UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

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THE CARDINAL'S SNUFF-BOX.	*Henry Harland.*
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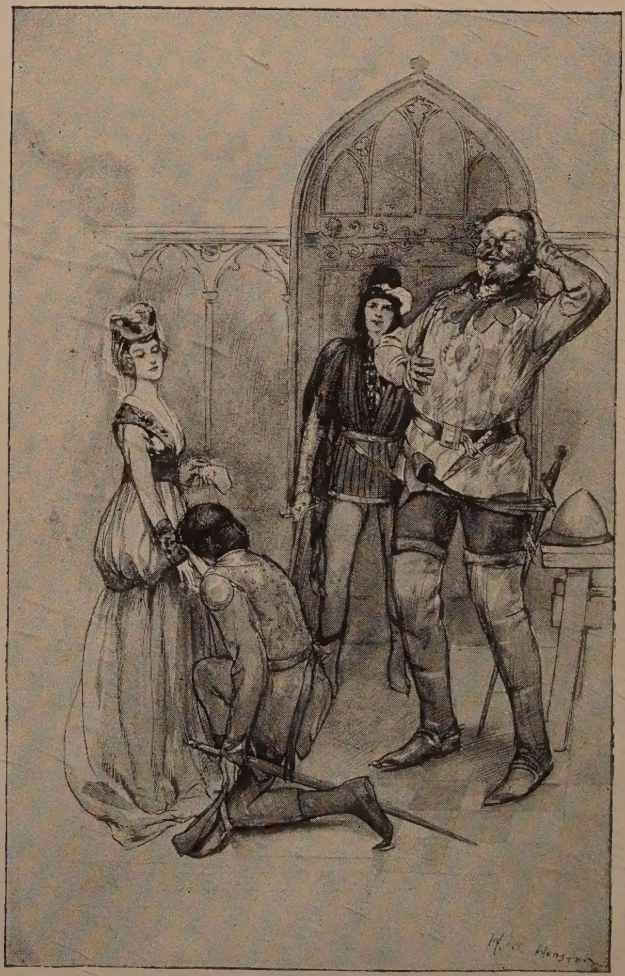
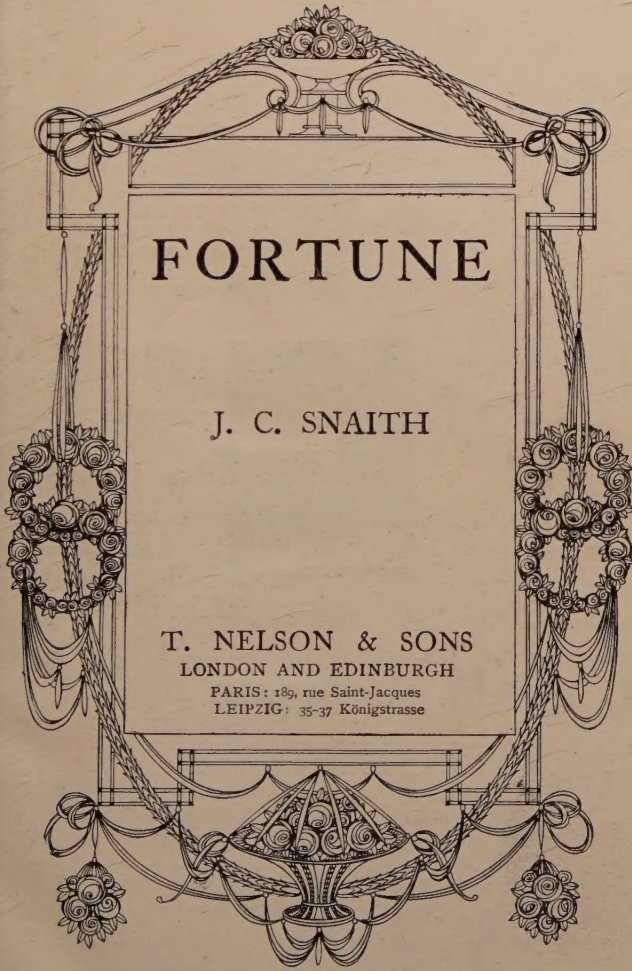


I fell to my knee and saluted the hand of this valiant and noble lady.



FORTUNE

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LONDON AND EDINBURGH
PARIS: 189, rue Saint-Jacques
LEIPZIG: 35-37 Königstrasse

THOMAS NELSON

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FORTUNE.

CHAPTER I.

OF MY JOURNEY TO THE PLAIN.

AS I left the place of my birth and long abiding and took the road to that far country where I thought my fortune lay, the sun already had a countenance. It was shining on the chestnut trees; on the tall white walls of the house of justice at the corner of the square; on the worthy priest who was sprinkling holy water on the steps of the monastery of the Bleeding Heart to suppress the dust, to keep away the flies, and to consecrate the building; and especially on the only bailiff that our town could boast, whose salary fluctuated with the thieves he captured. He, honest fellow, had driven so poor a trade of late that he crept along in his winter coat, seeking the shade of trees and houses.

Even at this time some portion of philosophy had gone to the increase of my mind, a habit which sprang, I think, from my mother's family — her

brother Nicholas was a clerk of Salamanca and wore a purple gown. So when it fell to consider two such matters as the dearth of rogues and the sun's majestic clemency it found a pleasant argument. I had yet to adventure half a league into the world, but unless my eyes were false, the place I had vowed to win was fair and full of virtue. Having such thoughts I rejoiced exceedingly. Thus I checked my horse a moment and, lifting up my eyes to heaven, was fain to salute the morning.

However, as I made to pursue my way, glowing with the generosity of my youth, my gaze was diverted by a thing of pity. It was an old poor woman sitting beside a door. She was thin and feeble. Her cheeks were hollow, there was no lustre in her glance, her mouth had not a tooth; but her face was such that I felt unable to pass her by. My father had an adage pertinent to her case. "Be kind to the poor," said the first of mankind, "and if you are not the happiest man in Spain, it is a conspiracy of Fortune's."

As I approached this aged creature I saw she had an eye which seemed to ask an alms yet did disdain it; and this war of pride and necessity in a poor beggar woman, halt and lean, led me to consider that she was not of the common sort, but had had a birth perhaps, and upon a day had known the cushions of prosperity. And this fancy moved my heart indeed, for in my view there is no more pitiful sight in nature than a blood Arab so broken in his wind and circumstances as to be condemned to base employments. There were

only ten crowns in my purse, but its strings were untied before I could consider of my private need. Bowing to her as solemnly as if she had been the daughter of a marquis—and who shall say that she was not ?—I begged her to accept a tenth part of my inheritance.

She received this invitation with those shy eyes that so much enhance her sex; while such confusion overcame the gentle soul that a minute passed before her faltering hand could draw a coin from the bag I held before her.

I went on my way with no more than nine crowns in my possession. Now, it is no light thing, believe me, reader, for a youth of one and twenty to adventure into an unknown country, upon a quest of fortune on a mountain horse, in the company of a sword of an ancient pattern, a leather jerkin laced with steel, a hat without a feather, and the sum of nine crowns, neither more nor less, for the whole of his estate.

I had set the nose of Babieca in the direction of the south. At first my way was taken through a pleasant country of great hills, that had cork trees on their slopes. Here and there little rivers ran in and out; sparkling in the morning sun; shining on the side of some tall mountain; circling round the foot of some grave precipice. But as the morning passed, and as hour by hour I went farther from my native hills, the nature of the land was changed. The cool woods and streams, the rich green pastures, and the fine tall hills with their garlands of dark forests yielded to a barren plain,

to which, alas! there appeared to be no end. It was bare and arid, and strewn in many places with sharp rocks. There was not a tree, not a stream of water; and such horrid quantities of sand consumed it that it became at last a desert whose life was sterile. A few barren shrubs were the only things that grew there; and, as I was soon to learn, an infinite degree of misery.

All this time the sun was rising in the sky, and when about the hour of noon it began to beat from a naked heaven whose face was brass, upon the unsheltered plain, this wilderness grew so fierce and garish as hardly to be borne. Mile upon mile I did assay and stoutly overcame; but horizon succeeded to horizon, each so bright and quivering with heat that the eye was afeared to meet it, each so bare, so flat, and so like the one that was before, glaring sand on every side and torrid fire everywhere, with never a prospect of shelter or abode, and so small a hope of change, that at last I began to shrink from the path I was determined on, and was even led to think this must be the high road to eternity.

Even before noon my mouth was parched like a dustpit. Thirst shrivelled my tongue, but no spring was there to quench it; nor was there a house to be seen. Indeed, the sun was become almost as cruel as he was formerly gentle, sitting in heaven like a ball of fire, and seeming to take pleasure from his pitiless descent on the coarse suit of a sanguine colour of one Miguel Jesus Maria de Sarda y Boegas. And to increase the evil of my

case my person was now taken with a pestilence of flies. These vindictive creatures bit my face and neck so sharply that the vexation of my person spread into my mind; whereon it rose to such a height against them as to provoke as round a fume of swearing as that of any rapscallion of the towns. Perforce I had to check this froward disposition in myself; for it is intolerable in one who boasts that his fortitude shall overcome the world, to find himself put out of countenance by the meanest insect in it.

It is no part of valour for a man to break and flee before an enemy, but the sun was now so much against me that I was fain to seek a refuge from him. Indeed, necessity was like to drive me to it all too soon, for there was already a kind of sickness creeping in my brain. So a little in the afternoon I saw through the fiery haze that trembled above the plain, a piece of scrub that promised a retreat. I turned my horse towards it with more alacrity than credit, though I am sure that had Cæsar himself been mounted that afternoon on my patient Babieca he must have acted even as did I, however the stoutness of his heart had cried out on the weakness of his nature.

I led Babieca into as much shade as I could devise, tied him to a bush, and crawled under it with my unlucky brains. While taking refuge here I had a fall in fortune. You will conceive, O admirable reader! that the sun, this false friend in whom I had reposed my trust, having dealt with me in this false spirit, there was no longer

that poetry in my temper with which I had begun my journey. I was beset with doubts. If a face so bright, so open, so intelligible could hide such malice, where was the candour of the world? By this pertinent reflection my thoughts were carried to the poor woman who had also shared my trust. Perchance it was not the part of wisdom to bestow the tenth portion of my inheritance upon a beggar in the road. Sorely considering this aspect of the case I took forth my pouch, and pouring my little means into my hand, not without a pang that one palm could hold it all, behold! in lieu of nine crowns I discovered that I had but eight.

Now, I was never afraid to believe that if a man hold a low opinion of his kind, and looks upon them in a spirit of askance, such a one is fit for no nice company, since he merits no more consideration than he is willing to bestow. But to find that my trust had been abused so wickedly gravelled me altogether. I could have wept for the petty trick and cried out upon the world. Nor would I have you to consider that it was a piece of lucre that led me to this mind. It was the plausibility, the cold ingratitude that pricked me like a dagger. I had hoped to carry upon my pilgrimage that good faith towards my fellows that my noble father had bade me entertain. It was to be my solace and my watchword. As I rode forth the zephyrs of the morning were to breathe it in my ears; at night I was to lie down in its security underneath the stars. "Man is a thing so excellent that this peerless world was made for his demesne." Thus

Don Ygnacio, and he was threescore years and seven when he perished of the stone. Was the seed of that true caballero to renounce a wisdom so mature because of a blow received by misadventure?

Some hours I lay in security, for I was in mortal fear of the ball of fire above my head. By a good chance I had placed a luncheon of rye bread and a piece of cheese made of goat's milk in my wallet. This I munched with discretion, for there was never a house to be seen, and this uninhabited plain appeared to stretch many miles. There was no spring at which to allay my thirst, and during long hours I was tormented dreadfully. My tongue and throat were blistered by the heat that arose from the burning sand. Bitterly did I lament that I had not had the wisdom to strap a skin of water to my saddle.

By the time the fury of the sun had grown somewhat less my head had recovered of its stroke, and I got upon my road. Nor was it in any bitterness of spirit that I went, for I had taken a solace from my meditations which reconciled me to the rape of my patrimony. It should call for more than a single mischance to break my faith in my brothers of the mountains and my cousins of the plains. Many a weary mile did I make ere the sun went down and a little pity for the wayfarer entered the firmament. My eyes did ache with the glare of the burning yellow ground; my body was sorely painful with the fatigues of travel; and when at last the sun was gone and the night and its stars appeared I gazed anxiously on every hand for the

sign of some habitation to which I might commit my distress. But there was never a poor inn nor a swineherd's hut to be seen in all this wilderness.

The night found me greatly doubtful of my way. I kept Babieca's head as fair to the south as I could reckon, but in the faint light of the stars a true course was difficult to point. Nor was it without its dangers, for the road was of a wretched nature. It was strewn with sharp-pointed boulders, sand, stunted grasses, and was full of holes. Whither it led I did not know. But I had been told, or perhaps had dreamt, that many famous cities lay before me buried in the mists of night. They were marked in my imagination as the homes of every splendid enterprise, of every fortunate endeavour; and beyond all else, of the fairest peoples of the fairest countries of the world.

It was very dark, but soon I saw these cities stretching out before me in the night. They were truly delectable to see; fair places all, with the morning beams upon a crowd of palaces, castles of a noble situation, large, white, and lofty churches built of stone, and a company of ships. I saw the sea, which was only known to me by rumour, that broad highway to the Indies and other foreign lands where fame and riches wait on boldness and can be picked like acorns from beneath the trees. I saw the waves, a dark yet radiant azure, which were said to ride a thousand galleons, filled with men of valour. I could see their friends upon the beach waving their farewells. And I know not what emotion then swept over me, for no sooner

did I observe the people in this fantasy than I remembered I had not a friend in all the world save Babieca, patient ambler and poor mountain creature that he was, and he was dumb like the stones upon the road. I felt the tears rising in my heart, and though I fought against them they were stubborn rebels not easy to suppress. For I cannot say with what intensity I longed at this dark hour for one glance from the eyes of him who was alive but a week ago.

My way was very lonely then, having strayed remote into a distant country. And very lonely was my heart; yet to those who will overpass my boldness I will confide it faltered not in resolution and therefore was not cold. For through all the long season of his adversity my father had maintained: "Courage is a living fire in a winter's night." Thus when the evening winds arose and chilled my body I pressed on, though I knew not whither, and had no thought of return. Hours came and hours went, and I had a great despair of sanctuary for myself and willing beast; and I had such a languor that it was not virtue of my own that held the reins. My belly was as bare as was this wilderness, yet my heart was fixed against complaint. I pressed forward stubbornly until at last Rabieca began to stumble at every yard he took.

Upon that both of us came to one mind. We could go no farther. I was seeking for a tree whose branches might afford some protection from the shrewd airs of the night, and in such a desert a

tree was hard to find, when I thought I discerned a light a great way off. I cannot tell you, reader, in what a tumult of hope I made towards this beacon. It showed across the waste so faintly that at first it looked no more than the ignis fatuus. Yet we had no other hope than this. Cheerful words to the hapless Babieca and shaking of the reins persuaded the good beast still to do his best. And presently these doubts were settled, for as we pressed on towards our talisman we found it to proceed from a sort of house. Thereupon I could have cried aloud for joy, in such a manner had hunger, weariness, and solitude wrought upon the hardihood of my resolves.

It was no easy task to find the place whence this light proceeded. And when at last I was able to learn I uttered a cry of delight. For it was an inn; a little inn and paltry, and yet the sweetest inn, I think, to which a traveller ever brought his weariness.

CHAPTER II.

OF AN INN. OF A MAN FROM FOREIGN PARTS.

On coming at last to the door I found this wayside inn to be of a mean condition, but at least it had four walls to it, and therefore might be called an inn. Such as it was it promised food and rest and the society of man. Observing a stable to be near at hand I led Babieca to it. A wretched hovel it was, yet it also had four walls of a sort and therefore might be called a stable.

Although no one came out of the inn to receive me and a great air of desolation was upon everything, I led Babieca within the hovel and contrived to find him a place in which he might repose. After much groping in the starlight—other light there was none—which came through the holes in the mud walls I was able to scrape enough straw together to form his bed. Also I was able to find him a supper of rough fare. And in so doing I observed that this poor place was in the occupation of a horse of a singular appearance. As well as I could learn in the darkness this was a very tall, large-boned, and handsome beast, sleek and highly fed. Near to it, hanging upon a nail in the wall, was a saddle so massive of artifice, and so rarely bedizened as to indicate that both this piece of furniture and the beast that bore it were in such a degree above the common sort as doubtless to be the property of a lord. And this conclusion pleased me very well; for I was glad to believe that one of his condition had lent his presence to this mean place, because there is no need to tell you, gentle reader, a man of birth needs one of a similar quality with whom to beguile his leisure.

As I issued, however, from the stable and made to enter the inn I was stayed at the door by a dismal rustic who proved to be the landlord. His bearing was of such singular dejection and in his countenance was such sore embarrassment as to make it clear that either a grievous calamity had lately befallen him or that one was about to do so.

"I give you good evening, honest fellow. Have you seen a ghost?"

The dismal wight placed a finger to his lip.

"Hush, sir! hush, I pray you!" he whispered hoarsely.

"Nay, my good fellow, I hush for no man—that is, unless you have a corpse in the house."

"I have worse than a corpse in the house," said the innkeeper, crossing himself.

"Worse than a corpse?"

"Yes, kind gentleman, a thousand times worse! How shall I speak it? I have the Devil."

The innkeeper made a piteous groan.

"I can hardly believe that," said I. "He is not often seen in Spain nowadays."

"Yes, it's the Devil right enough," said the innkeeper, wiping his eyes on the sleeve of his jerkin. "I am a ruined man."

"How does he seem in appearance? Are there horns on his head and does fire proceed out of his mouth?"

"He has an eye," said the innkeeper.

In spite of my incredulity I could not help shivering a little.

"The evil eye, your worship, the mal d'ojo. And he is so enormous! When he rises from his stool his head goes into the roof."

"Peace, honest fellow," I said stoutly. "The age of monsters is overpast."

"Ojala!" wailed the innkeeper, "your worship is in the wrong entirely. You can form no conception of what a fiend is this."

"There have been no monsters in Spain since the time of the Cid," said I, placing my hand on my sword.

"I tell you this is the fiend," said the innkeeper vehemently. "He is hugeous, gigantical; and when he cools his porridge he snorts like a horse. Three weeks has he lain upon me like the pestilence. He has picked my larder bare, and swears by his beard he'll treat my bones the same if I do not use him like an emperor. He has poured all the choice red wine out of my skins into his thrice cursed one. He outs his bilbo if a man so much as looks upon him twice. All my custom is scattered to the wind. *Me hace volver loco!* His mouth is packed with barbarous expressions. And he has an eye."

In spite of my father's sword and the natural resolution that goes with my name and province the strange excitement of the landlord made me thrill all over.

"It is the eye of the fiend," he said. "It glows red like coal; it is hungry like a vulture's, fierce like a wolf's. And then his voice—it is like an earthquake in the mountains. Oh, your worship, it is Lucifer in person who has come to comb my hair!"

I reproved the poor rustic for this levity.

"Nay, your worship, I speak the truth," he said miserably. "The good God knows it is so. I am a ruined man. The Devil has lain three weeks in my house, yet I have not received a cuarto for his maintenance. A lion could not be so ravenous.

He has devoured lean meat, fat meat, not to mention goodly vegetable. He has drunk wine enough to rot his soul. Ten men together could not use their fangs like he and roar so loud, yet I assure your worship I have not received so much as a cuarto."

"This matter is certainly grievous," said I. "Is there nothing you can do to get this person out of your house?"

"Nothing, nothing," said the innkeeper miserably. "Why, sir, I offered him the whole of the profits I made last year—no less than the sum of ten crowns—to go away from my inn before ruin had come upon me. He took my money, and said he would bring his mind to bear upon the subject."

"Was your course a wise one?"

"It may have been wise, your worship, and yet it may not. For upon bringing his mind to bear upon the subject, he said he had decided to curtail his visit by ten days; but as he is lying upon me still, it appears uncommonly like it that honest Pedro has had dealings with a villain."

"That is as may be," said I; "but the good Don Ygnacio de Sarda y Boegas, who died a week ago of the stone, would have no man judged harshly until his conduct had been carefully weighed."

"If Don Ygnacio was as good as you say, I expect he never had the Devil in person cooling his porridge at the side of his chimney."

"No, by my faith. But are you not calling this unlucky individual out of his true character?"

"Well, your worship, it is like this, do you see," said the innkeeper humbly; "poor Pedro once had the misfortune to steal a horse."

"You stole a horse, and yet you were not hanged!"

"No, your worship; they hanged my poor son in error. But perchance, if I unload my breast of this misfortune, it may please the Virgin Mary to lessen my afflictions."

"If you are a wise man you will also burn a candle or two. But, innkeeper, I will enter this venta of yours and speak with your guest, whoever he may be. For myself, I don't put much faith in the black arts."

I confess that our discussion of these unnatural affairs had provoked strange feelings. But I spoke as boldly as I could, and laid my hand on the hilt of my sword with so much determination that the poor wight of an innkeeper fell into a violent trembling.

"Oh no, your worship," he cried; "I would have you go upon your road. He is so prompt to violence that he will certainly slay you if you so much as show him your eyes."

"That is as may be," said I, taking a tighter grip upon my sword.

"Oh, your worship," said the innkeeper, "I pray you use him tenderly. I beseech you be gentle of your discourse. He would pare the nails of the Cid. He fills the world with woes as easily as a she-ass fills a house with fleas."

"You must obey me, innkeeper," I said sternly,

but without anger I hope, for the state of the poor fellow's mind had moved me to pity. "You must remember that a caballero of my province is afeared only of God."

The unlucky wight, finding that I was not to be gainsaid, led the way, with many misgivings, into his squalid house.

There was only one apartment for the service of guests. It was a poor one enough, with hardly anything in it except the lice on the walls and three candles which burned dismally. Such a hovel was only fit for the entertainment of pigs, cows, and chickens; yet it was not its quality that first awoke my attention. Neither was it the extremely singular personage that was seated at the side of the fire.

It was the delicious smell of cookery that filled the whole place. This proceeded out of a great seething pot that hung in the chimney. To one who had travelled all day nothing could have been more delectable. At its sight and odour my hunger began to protest fiercely, for my last piece of victual had been eaten at noon.

Seated on a low stool, as near to the pot as he might venture without being scorched in the legs, I found the author of these grievances. His gaze was riveted upon this delicious kettle. His enormous limbs were outstretched across the hearth, a rare cup of liquor was beside his stool, and so earnestly was he gazing at the meat as it tossed and hissed in the cauldron that upon my entrance he did not stir, but, without so much as removing his

chin from his hands, continued in his occupation with an air of approval and expectancy.

For myself, I honoured him with a long and grave look. Since that distant evening in my youth I have met with many chances and adventures in my travels. I have fallen in with persons of all kinds—the virtuous, the wicked, and those who are neither one nor the other. I have broken bread with princes, philosophers, rogues, slaves, and men of the sword—men of all nations and of every variety of fortune—yet I believe never one so remarkable as he who now kept the chimney of this wretched venta upon a three-legged stool. The length of his limbs was extraordinary; his shoulders were those of a giant; and even in his present careless and recumbent attitude he wore an uncommonly sinister and formidable look.

His dress at one time would scarcely have come amiss to a prince, yet now it was barely redeemed from that of a beggar. The original colour of his doublet, which hung in tatters, was an orange tawny, but it was now so soiled and rent that it could have stood for any hue one cared to name. His cloak, which hung upon the wall, was of a bright blue camlet, and was but little superior to the condition of his doublet. Purple silk had once formed the substance of his hose, but now the better part of it was cloth, having suffered many patchings with that material. Added to such conspicuous marks of indigence, his long yellow riding boots were split in pieces, one even revealed the toe of a worsted stocking; whilst his scabbard

was in such case as it sprawled on the ground beside his leg that the naked point was visible.

When I came near and fell to regard him the better, he did me the honour to lift his left eye off the cooking-pot. He proceeded to stare at me in a manner of the most lazy indifference, and yet of the greatest insolence imaginable. Then, without saying a word, he yawned in my face and turned the whole of his attention again to the kettle.

Such a piece of sauciness made me feel angry. Had I been a dog I could not have been met with less civility. My hand went again to the hilt of my sword as I took a closer view of his visage. It was as red as borracho, shining with cunning and the love of the cup. But it was the eye he had fixed upon me that gave me the most concern. The poor innkeeper was right when he spoke of his eye. It was as rude as a tiger's, and animated with such a hungry look that it might have belonged to a dragon who desired to know what sort of meal stood before him.

Though I might be in doubt as to what was his station, whether it was that of a lord or a mendicant, since his assemblance suggested that he partook of both these conditions, I had no doubt at all that he was not a Spanish gentleman—for where should you find a caballero of our most courteous nation who would so soil his manners as to treat a stranger with this degree of impudency? Yet there was a great air of possession about him as he sat his stool, as though every

stick and rafter of the inn was his own private furniture, so that I almost felt that I was intruding within his castle. There was, again, that insolence in his looks as clearly implied that it was his habit to command a deal of consideration from the world; and as a lord is a lord in every land, whether he happen to be a Spaniard or a German Goth, I opened, like a skirmisher, in the lightest manner, not to provoke offence, for I trust that Miguel Jesus Maria de Sarda y Boegas has ever too much respect for his forebears to humiliate a man of birth.

"I give the greeting of God to your excellency," I began, uncloaking myself and bowing low, as became a hidalgo of my nation.

The occupant of the stool made no sign that I had addressed him, except that he spat in the fire.

"May it please you, sir—a thousand pardons," said I; "but I have heard a tale of you from the keeper of this inn that never did consist with gallantry. And may I pray you to have it rectified, for the poor fellow is sorely afflicted in his understanding."

At this address the occupant of the stool took his left eye off the cooking-pot for the second time, and fixed it upon me slowly and mockingly, and said in a rude, foreign accent that was an offence to my ears,

"Yes, my son, pray me by all means; or shrive me, or baptize me, or do with me just as you please. I have grown old in the service of virtue, yet perhaps I ought to mention that I have not so much as the price of a pot of small ale in my poke."

"By your leave, sir, you are upon some misapprehension," said I. "It is not your money that I crave, but your civility."

"Civility, my son. Well, I dare say I can arrange for as much of that as you require."

"It is pleasing to know that, sir. But this innkeeper—unhappy man—does not appear to have partaken of it."

The occupant of the stool took my remonstrance in fairer part than there was reason to expect. Indeed he even abated his manners into some appearance of politeness.

"You appear to judge shrewdly for one of your years, my young companion," he said, in a voice that fell quite soft. "But if I must speak the truth, this innkeeper is a notorious villain; and if I am ever civil to a notorious villain, I hope Heaven will correct me."

"Even upon such a matter as that, sir," I said gravely, "there may be two sorts of opinion. Even if this poor innkeeper is not so virtuous as he might be, it will not help him on the true path to be mulcted in his substance."

"By cock!" said the occupant of the stool, "it is an old head you wear on your shoulders, my young companion. You speak to a point. I can tell you have been to college."

"Sir, you are mistaken in this, although I come of a good family upon the side of both my parents. My uncle Nicholas is magister in the university of Salamanca; and as for my father, lately deceased, he was one of the wisest men that ever lived."

"Yes, I can see that," said the occupant of the stool, whose voice had fallen softer than ever. "It is as plain as my hand."

Somewhat curiously, and perhaps with a little of the vanity of youth, I sought a reason for this estimate.

"It is as plain as the gown of a woman of virtue," he said, with a stealthy down-looking glance. "I have a wonderful eye for merit. You can never disguise birth and condition from one like myself. I am a former clerk of Oxford, and my lineage is such that modesty forbids me to name it before supper."

"Oxford," said I, taking this quaint, barbarous name upon my tongue with pain. "Saving your presence, sir, what part of our great peninsula is that? It sounds not unlike the province of Galicia, where I know the dialect and the people are allowed to be a little uncivil."

"Not too quickly, my son. The university of Oxford is about a day's journey from the centre of the world."

"Then, sir, it must be somewhere in Castile."

"Why Castile, my son?"

"Madrid is in the province of Castile, and that, I believe, is generally reckoned to be the centre of the world."

"My young companion, I sit corrected," said the occupant of the stool, with a humble air that went not at all well with his countenance. "When I was young I was always taught that the centre of the world was London; but I dare say

the world has moved on a little since those days."

"London, sir!" said I; for here was another barbarous word I had never heard before. "I pray you tell me in what part of our peninsula is London."

Instead of replying to this question, the occupant of the stool began to purse his lips in an odd manner, and to rub his chin with his forefinger.

"By my soul," he said, "that is a plaguy odd question to address to an English gentleman!"

"Doubtless it may be," said I, "to one who has travelled much, and knows our great peninsula from one end to the other; but I confess I never left my native province before this morning."

"Never left your province before this morning!" said this strange person, laughing softly. "Is it conceivable? If you had kept it close it would have required great wisdom to suspect it. Your mind has been finely-trained, my young companion, and your air is so finished that I should like to see it at the court of Sophy."

I was fain to bow at so much civility. Yet he was laughing softly all the while, and there was a covert look in his eye that I mistrusted.

"Would you say that I had been drinking," said he, "if I declare to you upon my honour that London never was in Spain at all?"

"I take it nowise amiss, sir; yet if London is no part of Spain I fail to see how it can be the centre of the world."

For the moment I feared this extraordinary

man would fall from his stool, so forcibly did his laughter ascend to the roof. I felt some discomposure, for surely such an action was no part of courtesy. Judging, however, that it is the first business of the polite to refrain from outfacing the rude with their own manners, I gathered all my patience and said, not without haughtiness, I fear: "Sir, are you not from foreign parts?"

"Nay, my young son of the Spains, I am come to foreign parts, if that is your question. I was born and bred in England; I am the natural son of an English king; I have dwelt in England half my years; and when I die my bones shall lie in England, for since the time of Uthyr Pendragon, the respected progenitor of an English sovereign, no scion of my name has left his bones to rot in a foreign climate."

"England," said I; "the land is as strange to me as far Cathay."

It was in vain that I strove to recall what I had heard of this remote island country. Yet, as I could recollect nothing whatever about it, I was fain to believe that I had never heard of it at all.

CHAPTER III.

OF THE EATING OF MEAT.

No sooner had I made this confession than this remarkable man uttered a shout that filled the place like the report of a caliver.

"By my hand," he cried, "what a nation! Have you ever heard of the moon, my son?"

"Certainly, sir, I have heard of the moon."

"Come now, he's heard of the moon. How learned they are getting in this cursed peninsula! This must be one of the clergy."

"Yes, sir," I said with sternness, for the sauciness of his look was hard to condone; "I have heard of the moon continually; and under your good favour I am willing to hear of this England of which you make mention. Where may it be?"

"Well, to begin with, I could never learn that it was in Spain. Thereby I have a predilection to my prayers, that I may reward heaven for its good kindness."

This incensed me greatly.

"It must be a barbarous land this England, if I may judge by what it breeds," was my rejoinder.

"Barbarous indeed," said he. "There are more barbers in England than there are honest men in this peninsula."

"You misunderstand me, sir, I am afraid."

"I hope I do misunderstand you, my son; for if I do not, it would almost appear that you are a native of this damnable country."

"Mother of Jesus!" I cried, "this is intolerable."

Such a taunt was beyond my patience; and when I fell to consider that he who applied it to my country, was native to a land in which civilization had yet its work to do—I had now a recollection that these English were a dreadful brawling people, a

race of robbers who sold their swords for gain, and overran the whole of Europe—I deemed it proper to indulge a grievance against this foreigner whose demeanour was so rude.

"Señor caballera, I fear I am under the necessity of having to correct you."

I laid my hand on my sword with a dignified gesture.

"By all means, young Hop-o'-my-Thumb." His harsh voice sank into a most remarkable cooing softness. "I am ever open to correction, as becomes a good mother's son who hath received it regularly."

"Here, sir, and now," I cried hotly, dragging my sword from its case.

While I had been speaking, the eyes of the barbarian had opened wider and wider, till at the moment I showed him my steel he opened his mouth and sent up such a peal of laughter to the hams, onions, and lemons that lined the beams in the roof, as nearly provoked the poor innkeeper, who all this time had taken care to keep behind me, to take leave of his wits.

"Why, if this is not a giant-killer"—he pressed his hands to his ribs and roared like a bull—"I am not a king's son. By the lord Harry, what a notable assemblance have we here! By cock, how he doth spread his five feet nothing! If he had but a beard under his chin, he might break an egg. And look you, he holds his point as staunchly as old harlequin bears his wand in the Lord Mayor's Show."

"On guard, sir, immediately"—I advanced a

step upon him—" before I run you through the heart."

Instead, however, of heeding my purpose, he continued to address most immoderate roars to the roof, and his huge frame swayed on the stool like a ship in distress.

" Why, there's fierceness ! " he roared. " The valiancy of the tempest in a pouncet box. By my good soul, I have never seen anything so terrible, unless it is a cricket sitting under a thorn with its ears spread, or a squirrel casting for nuts in a scarce July. But here's my hand, little Jack Giant-killer. Do you hop upon it like a good thing ; and I pray you, Jacky, do not preen your feathers like a starling, else a fluxion will mount in my brains and I shall spit blood."

The enormous barbarian held his hand towards me, as though I were a small bird with feathers, and he puckered up his mouth, as if he would coax me to perch upon his forefinger. He kept gazing at me sideways, and now and again would whisk away his face and break into laughter the most unseemly.

I tapped the point of my sword on the floor in the instancy of anger.

" Feathers ! " he cried. " By my good soul, they preen and bristle like the back of a goose. Why I would like to wear your quills in my bonnet and eat your grease in a pie."

" I am afraid you do not apprehend, sir," said I, striving to regain my composure, " with whom you hold speech. My name is Sarda ; and Don

Ygnacio, my illustrious father, both by descent and nurture was one of the first of his native province of Asturias. His family have served their country in a thousand ways, since the time of that Ruy Diaz whom we call familiarly the Cid."

"Is that so, good Don, is that really the case?" The Englishman averted his countenance. "Then if you are the offshoot of such an illustrious trunk, you must be as nearly full of high breeding as an elderly bonaroba is full of dignity. Good Master Don What-do-you-call-yourself, I pray you do not make me laugh; the best surgeons in the county of Middlesex have warned me against flux of the brain and the spitting of blood. All the most accomplished minds of a pretty good house have died in that way."

"Sir Englishman," said I, "I grieve for this demeanour which you display; but the last of our name must follow the practice of his fathers. Your language is unseemly; it is to be regretted; the misprisions you have urged against my country cannot go unmarked."

"Oh, my young companion," said he, striving to be grave, yet failing to appear so, "I am persuaded I shall die a horribly incontinent death."

With might and main he strove to behave more worthily. By taking infinite pains he was able at last to compose his coarse red features, bloated with the cup and stained by the sun, into n appearance of respectfulness; but the moment I bespoke him down went his chin, his enormous frame began to quiver, and forth came another roar that echoed

along the rafters like the discharge of an arquebuse.

Such conduct put me out of countenance completely. Although my experience of the world was not such as to teach me how to meet it becomingly, I was determined that it should not go free. I had a passion to run him through the body, but this could not be done while he continued to pay no regard to my sword. Yet, as he was impervious to those methods of courtesy that were the pride of my race, I determined to adopt a mode more extreme. I was about to deal him a blow in the face with my hand, to bring him to a sense of his peril, when, like a wise fellow, the innkeeper made a diversion. And this for the time being changed the current of affairs.

He fished a ham from the cooking-pot, and laid it on a dish. No sooner did the Englishman discover this meat to be set against his elbow than out he whipped his dagger and fell upon it, being no more able to contain his inclination than are the beasts that perish. Perforce, I had to put up my sword and abide in patience until this barbarian had quelled his appetite. But I had not reckoned well if I thought he would do this easily. Never have I seen a man eat so rapidly, so grossly, so extensively as this gigantical foreigner. At last came a pause in this employ, whereupon he regarded me with the grease shining about his chaps.

"Why, good Don," said he, "you look a little sharp yourself. You have travelled overlong upon your emptiness, or I am a rogue. You shouldn't

do it, my son, you shouldn't do it. Always be courteous to the belly, and you will find her docile. Neglect her, good Don, and you will find her a jade. Landlord, will you have the goodness to bring a platter for our friend of the feathers, or must I be put to the trouble of fixing the point of my dagger into your filthy Iberian skin ? "

The innkeeper, who appeared to have no desire to place the Englishman to this necessity, was mightily prompt in his obedience. Also, he fished a second ham out of the kettle, from which the Englishman cut a great portion, laid it on his own platter, and gave over the remainder to me.

" There is a marrow-bone to suck," said he. " 'Tis the sweetest luxury, that and a drop of sherris."

Almost overcome with the pangs of hunger as I was, nothing was further from my intention than to accept a courtesy at these rude hands. Yet, after all, continence has a poor sort of virtue in the presence of a mistress of such despotic powers. Before I was aware that I had so much as taken the delicious platter into my keeping, I was conveying sweet smoking morsels into my mouth. And as the propitiation of so imperious a creature is at all times a delightful exercise, I had scarce felt my teeth in the delectable pig than I forgot my feud against the Englishman. Also I forgot my disgust at the manner of his feeding ; for so choice were these dainty morsels that, after all, I considered it were better not to judge him harshly, as, perhaps, his methods were less unworthy than they seemed. And he, having dealt faithfully

with his second ham, and having called for a pint of sherry in a voice like a trumpet, ere I was half upon my course, proceeded to smile upon my dealings with the marrow-bone in a fashion that can only be described as brotherly.

"He who stands not true to the trencher is a poor shot," he said with a most encouraging smile. "A brave demeanour at meals is as necessary to the blood, the assemblance and the superstructure of man, as is piety, good principles, and contemplation to the soul. Therefore, eat away, my good little Don Spaniardo, and I pray you to forget that I am present. If my own poor courage could in anywise compare with yours I should be as near to perfection as is woman to deceit. Small in circumference thou art, fair shrew, but thou art a beautiful champer, and a notorious lover of flesh. How wouldst thou esteem a salad, my son, of the brains of a Jew, as Sir Purchas of my name, and worthy kinsman, always yearned for and so seldom obtained? He was a man if you please, and notoriously fine at his meals. I never heard of a man who was better before a leg of mutton with caper sauce; and he drank canaries until the very hour they came to measure him for his shell. How rarely do you find a great nature disrespectful to its knife and its nuncheon. Modesty in the presence of flesh meat is a menace to virtue. But for that I must have been twice the man that I am. Ha! my son, give my old pluck such bravery and I would pawn my pedigree and be a slave, for a liberal stomach is no friend to displeasure."

"Yet, good Englishman," said I, with a touch, I fear, of our northern slyness, "you seem to do pretty well."

"Pretty well!" He sighed heavily. "Pretty well is pretty well; pretty well is neither here nor there. Landlord, bring me this minute a bite of cheese, about so big as the knee of a bee; and further, landlord, another cup of this abominable sherris, or by this hand I will cut your throat, as I am the son of a sainted Christian lady."

To lend point to this drastic utterance, the Englishman scowled like a fiend and drew his sword. This weapon, like everything about him, was of a monstrous character, and he stuck it in the ground beside his stool.

CHAPTER IV.

OF FURTHER PASSAGES AT THE INN.

Upon this action, the innkeeper came forward fearfully, for he felt that destruction threatened. When he had replenished the cup of his remarkable guest, I was fain to observe its curious nature. Its mouth was as wide as a bowl; and as the body which contained the wine was in a right proportion to the rim, it had rather the appearance of a pancheon than a cup of sherry. It was cast in silver, was gorgeously chased, while its whole device was quaint and ingenious. Indeed, I marvelled how one so poor as this innkeeper should have

an article of so much worth and beauty in his possession.

After the Englishman had fitted his mouth to the rim for so long a period that he must have come near to looking upon the bottom, he gave back the cup to the innkeeper, and ordered it to be refilled. It was then handed to me, and I was invited to drink.

"That is if you can," said he. "It is such a damnable liquor that personally I hardly durst touch it. But I suspect your stomach is not so proud as mine, you strong-toothed rogue. You see, we English are a most delicate people."

I drank a copious draught of the wine, which was excellent, or at least my great thirst of the day had made it so. Then said the Englishman, eyeing me with approval:

"Well, my young companion, and what do you think of the pot?"

"The pot is worthy of notice," said I, examining its rare contexture.

"It has been admired in Europe, and it has been admired in Asia," said the Englishman. "That it merits attention I have been informed by half the great world. For example, the Emperor Maximilian broached a cask of Rhenish in its homage, and would, I doubt not, have fallen as drunk as a Cossack, had it been possible for a great crowned person to embrace these indecent courses. He offered me a thousand guilders for that pot; but said I, 'Honest Max,—I must tell you, Spaniard, there is no crowned person of my

acquaintancy for whom I entertain a higher regard —'honest Max,' I said, 'offer your old gossip the Baltic ocean, the sun, the moon, and the most particular stars of heaven, and that pot will still remain faithful to my house.' 'Why so, honest Dick?' said the Emperor. 'It is in this wise, my old bully rook,' said I, fetching him a buffet along the fifth rib with a kindly cordiality, 'that pot was given many years ago by the famous Charlemagne to my kinsman, Sir Cadwallader Pendragon, for his conduct upon the field of battle.' 'In that case, worthy Richard, friend of my youth and beguiler of my maturity,' said the Emperor, embracing me with the greatest affection and filling my old sack cup with gold dollars—all the dollars are gold in Turkey—'I do not ask it of you; let it remain an heirloom in your house.' Therefore you will see at once, good Spaniard, that this pot is in some sort historical. And in all my travels I bear it at my saddle bow; so whether I happen to lie down with fleas in a villainous Spanish venta hard by to purgatory; or whether I happen to sit at the right hand of potentates in England, Germany, and France, I can take my sack as I like to take it—that is, easily and copiously, with a proper freedom for the mouth, and with a brim that's wide enough to prevent the nose from tapping against the sides."

Curious as I had been from the first in regard to this strange individual, the nature of his conversation rendered me more so. In spite of his remarkable appearance, his costume might once have been that of a person of condition, however lamentably

it failed to be so now; while his manners, although none of those of the great of my own country, may yet have been accustomed to receive consideration from the world. Therefore I said with a bow, "Good Sir Englishman, under your worshipful indulgence I would make so bold as to ask your name."

Such a request seemed to give him great pleasure.

"That is a very proper question," said he, "for my name happens to be one that has been favourably mentioned in every nation of the civilized globe."

"Yes, sir, I feel sure of it," said I; for as he spoke his dignity grew of the finest nature.

"You ask my name, good Spaniard; well now, what do you think of Richard Pendragon for a name?"

"A truly fine name," said I, being led to this statement by the love of politeness, although I am not sure that I did not feel it to be a very barbarous name after all.

"Sir Richard Pendragon, knight; yes, by my hand, that's a name! I have seen Goths and Arabs turn pale at it; it has been embraced by the foremost in valour; it has lain in the bed of queens. Yet the bearer of that name is gentle enough, by my soul; for it is the name of a good and true man, a simple knight, a valiant friend, a courteous enemy; a humble-minded seeker of light who is addicted to reading the stars and the works of nature. I have seen the wearer of this most inimitable name wipe the blood of a Barbary pirate off his sword with the

hem of his pourpoint, and sit down and write a ballad. I have never seen his superior in female company. You may well ask my name, good Spaniard, for, without making a boast, which I abhor, where shall you find such performance united to such simplicity, such chaste austerity to such constancy in love? I tell thee, Spaniard, had I not been nurtured in humility, had I not been inducted to it by my sainted mother, even as the young kid is taught to bleat by the reception of its milk, I must have been a boaster, for I am of royal lineage, and the blood of kings flows under my doublet.

"Hombre de dios!" I cried excitedly, for my own brains seemed overmounted by his enthusiasm, "you have indeed a great name. I would love to hear of those kings of whom you appear to be such a worthy descendant."

"This is a proper curiosity, my honest youth. The name of my father is no less than Edward of England. I am his son, but not his heir. If every man walked according to his merit, the royal offspring that bespeaks you would have the crown of Great Britain tilted upon his left eyebrow at an angle of forty-five degrees."

"For what reason have you not, sir, if you are indeed the king's son and the crown is yours in the course of nature?"

"There was a little irregularity connected with my birth, which at the time of its occurrence I was not in a situation to adjust. Thenceforward a race of knaves and formalists have taken the wall of honest Dick, and have placed another upon the

throne of England. But mark me, my son, the hour will strike when one who has grown old in the love of virtue will make good his estate, for he can show a line of kings upon both sides of his family. Upon the side of his dam is one Uthyr Pendragon, and of the seed of him sprang Arthur, who many years ago was a sovereign lord of Britain. It was many years ago, I say, but this Arthur was a good prince, a man of integrity, and his name is still mentioned favourably in his native country."

"When, sir, do you propose to make this attempt upon the throne of England?"

At this question Sir Richard Pendragon assumed an air of magnificence, which did not consort very well with the hole in his scabbard and the condition of his hose and doublet.

"All in a good season," he said majestically. "If not to-day it will be to-morrow. The truth is the machinations of the wicked have left me somewhat light in purse, and have also blown upon my reputation. But I don't doubt that some fair morning when the larks are singing, the first-born son of a sainted mother, for all his misfortune and his plaguy dry throat, will land at Dover and march to London city at the head of twenty thousand Christian gentlemen who have sworn to redress his injuries."

"May I be one of so fair a company!" said I, feeling the spell of his passion.

"Amen to that, honest youth." He spoke superbly. "Give old honest Dickon your hand upon it. There is no sort of doubt that I shall

hold you to a vow that does such honour to your nation and your character. By the way, is that a ring I see upon your finger, honest youth ? "

" It is an heirloom of my house," said I. " It was given by my father to my mother when he came to woo her."

The Englishman raised his eyebrows with an aspect of grave interest.

" Was that so, my young companion ? Given by your father to your mother—was that really the case ? And set with agates, unless my eyes deceive me."

" Yes, they are agates."

" The sight of agates puts me in mind of a ring I had of my old friend, the Sophy. I used always to affect it on the middle finger of the right hand, just as you affect your own, my son, until it was coveted by my sainted mother upon a wet Ash Wednesday."

Still exhibiting the tokens of a lively regard, the Englishman began to fondle the ring as it lay on my finger.

" An honest band of gold, of a very chaste device. It looks uncommonly choice on the hand of a gentleman. Does it not fit somewhat loosely, my young companion ? "

Speaking thus, and before I could suspect his intention, Sir Richard Pendragon drew the ring off my finger. He held it up to the light, and proceeded to examine it with the nicest particularity.

" I observe it was made in Milan," said he. " It must have lain for years in a nobleman's family. My own was fashioned in Baghdat, but I would say

this is almost as choice as the gift of the Sophy. And as I say, my son, it certainly makes an uncommonly fine appearance on the hand of a gentleman."

Thereupon Sir Richard Pendragon pressed the slender band of metal upon the large fat middle finger of his right hand.

"It comes on by no means so easy as the Sophy's gift," said he; "but then, to be sure, my old gossip had a true circumference taken by the court jeweller. I often think of that court jeweller, such an odd, brisk little fellow as 'a was. 'A had a cast in the right eye, and I remember that when he walked one leg went shorter than its neighbour. But for all that 'a knew what an agate was, and his face was as open as a fine evening in June."

With an air of pleasantry that was impossible to resist, Sir Richard passed his cup and exhorted me to drain it. I drank a little of the wine, yet with some uneasiness, for it was sore to me that my father's talisman was upon the hand of a stranger.

"I shall thank you, sir, to restore the ring to my care."

"With all the pleasure in life, my son." The Englishman took hold of his finger and gave it a mighty pull, but the ring did not yield.

He shook his head and began to whistle dolefully.

"Why, as I am a good Christian man this plaguy ring sticks to my hand like a sick kitten to a warm hearthstone. Try it, my son, I pray you."

I also took a pull at the ring, which was wedged so firmly upon his hand, but it would not budge.

"This is indeed a terrible matter," said Sir Richard Pendragon. "What is to be done, young Spaniard?"

He called the innkeeper and bade him bring a bowl of cold water. Into this he dipped his finger; and although he held it in the water for quite a long time, the ring and his right hand could not be induced to part company.

"What is the price you set upon this ring, my young companion?"

"The ring is beyond price—it was my mother's—and has ever been in the keeping of an ancient house."

"If it is beyond price there is an end to the question. I was about to offer you money, but I see you have one of those lofty spirits that can brook no vulgar dross. Well, well, pride of birth is a good thing, and money is but little. Yet one who has grown old in the love of virtue would like to requite you in some way. Had we not better throw a main with the dice? If I win I wear the ring for my lawful use; and if I lose you shall have the good tuck that was given to me by the King of Bavaria for helping him against the Dutch."

I did not accept this suggestion, as you may believe. Yet it gave me sore concern to see my father's heirloom upon the hand of this foreigner. In what fashion it was to be lured from his finger I was at a loss to know; and in my inexperience of the world I did not know what course to embrace.

CHAPTER V.

I HEAR OF THE PRINCESS.

Upon his own part Sir Richard Pendragon showed a wonderful calmness. He wore the ring upon his finger with so great an air, and withal was so polite that the forcing of a quarrel was put out of the question. None the less it was clear that if ever I was to recover my father's gift it must be at the point of the sword.

It is always claimed, however, by the natives of my province, which in the things of the mind is allowed to be the first in all Spain, that a cool judgment must ride before violence. Therefore I was in no haste to push the matter to an extremity. My mind was set that I could only regain possession of the trinket by an appeal to the sword; that soon or late we must submit ourselves to that arbitrament, but as the night was yet in its youth, I felt there was no need to force the brawl before its season. Thus, nursing my injury in secret, I marked the man narrowly as he sat on his stool, with his hungry eyes forever trained upon me sideways, and forever glancing down with furtive laughter, while his great lean limbs in their patched, parti-coloured hose, in which the weather had wrought various hues, were sprawled out towards the warmth of the chimney.

As thus he lay it was hard to decide whether he was indeed a king's son or no more than a fluent-spoken adventurer. And in spite of the flattering opinions

he put forward of his own character, I was fain to come to it that the latter conclusion was at least very near to the truth. For one thing, the lack of seriousness in his demeanour did not consort very well with the descendant of princes, whom all the world knows to be grave men. He never so much as looked towards me without a secret light of mirth in his eye; and this I was unable to account for, as for myself I had never felt so grave.

"Sir Richard Pendragon, knight," said he, for no particular reason, unless it were the love of hearing his own discourse; "of all names I believe that to be the most delectable; for it is the name of a true man, of one addicted to contemplation, and of one who has grown old in the love of virtue. Sir Richard Pendragon, knight—a name is a small thing, but it has its natural music; Sir Richard Pendragon, knight—yes, it runs off the tongue to a tune. I think, my young companion, you have already admired it?"

"Indeed, sir, I have," said I, with a certain measure of mockery, of which, upon occasion, those of my province are said to be adept in the use. "I conceive it to be a most wonderful name. Have you not said so yourself?"

"If I have, I have," said he, patting my shoulder with a familiarity for which I did not thank him. "After all, the murder was obliged to come out. Is it the part of valour to shun the truth? My young companion, I feel sure you are one of those who respect that pious opinion that is shared by P. Ovidius Naso and other learned commentators

upon the subject. Indeed, it is very well that a name which stands so high in middle Europe is come into this outer part. Quite recently I feared it to be otherwise. I met an itinerant priest, not a month ago, bald, obese, and biblical, who said that to his mind my name was deficient. 'Fair sir, for what is it celebrated?' was his question. 'For what is it celebrated, reverend one?' was my rejoinder. 'Why, where can you have lived these virtuous years of yours? It is the name of a notorious pea-nut and straw-sucker.' 'That is verily a singular accomplishment,' said the reverend father in God. 'Yes, your reverence,' I answered, 'this old honest fellow can draw a nut through a straw with the same complacency as a good churchman can draw sack through the neck of a bottle.' 'That is indeed remarkable,' said the reverend father, and proceeded to demonstrate that as pea-nuts were wide and straws were narrow, it was no light matter. 'Yes, my father,' said I, 'that is a very just observation. But I am sure you would be the last to believe that one who has a king's blood flowing under his doublet would bring his mind to anything trivial.' 'Doubtless your view is the correct one,' said the reverend sceptic, 'but all the same, I fail to see how a king's blood would be able to compass a feat of that nature.' 'There is none shall say what a king's blood will compass,' was my final rejoinder, 'for there is a particular genius in it.' Yet, my young son of the Spains, I have little doubt that the worthy Dominican is still breaking his mind upon this problem behind the walls

of Mother Church ; and such is the subtlety of these scholars with their thumb rules and their logicality, that presently you shall find that this innocent pleasantry has unhinged the brains of half the clerks in Salamanca."

" You have indeed a ready wit and a subtle contrivance, sir," said I at the conclusion of this ridiculous tale, for it was plain that he looked for some such comment upon it.

" You must blame my nation for that. Every Englishman is witty when he has taken wine ; he is an especially bright dog in everything after the drinking of beer. You dull rogues of the continent can form no conception of an Englishman's humour."

" How comes it, sir, that you find yourself an exile from this land which, by your account of it, is fair unspeakably ? "

" It is a matter of fortune," he made answer.

" Is that to say you are on a quest of fortune ? " said I, breathing high at this magic word.

" You have come to the truth," said he with a sigh and a smile and a sidelong look at the sword that hung by his leg.

" Why then, sir," I cried with an eagerness I could not restrain, " we are as brothers in this matter. I also am on a quest of fortune."

My words seemed to jump with the humour of Sir Richard Pendragon. He looked at me long and curiously, with that side glance which I did not find altogether agreeable, stroked his beard as if sunk in deep thought, and said with the gravest air I had heard him use,—

"Oh, indeed, my son, is that the case? So you are on a quest of fortune, are you, my son? Well, she is a nice, a proper, and a valiant word."

"My father was ever the first to allow it," said I. "She used him ill; his right hand was struck off in a battle at a tender age, but I never heard him complain about her."

"She hath ever been haughty and distant with old English Dick," said my companion, sighing heavily; "but you will never hear that true mettle abuse the proud jade. Fortune," he repeated and I saw his great hungry eyes begin to kindle until they shone like rubies—"oh, what a name is that! She is sweeter in the ears of us of England than is the nightingale. What have we not adventured in thy name, thou perfect one! Here is this Dick, this old red bully, with his dry throat and his sharp ears and his readily watering eye, what hath he not dared for thee, thou dear ungracious one! He has borne his point in every land, from the wall of China to the high Caucasian mountains; from the blessed isles of Britain to farthest Arabia. Who was it drove the Turk out of Vienna with a six-foot pole? Who was it beat the Preux Chevalier off his ground with a short sword? Who was it slew the Sultan of the Moriscoes with his own incomparable hand? Who was it, and wherefore was it, my son?"

In this exaltation of his temper he peered at me with his side-glance, as though he would seek an answer to a question to which no answer was necessary.

"Why do I handle," he proceeded, "the sword, the broadsword, the short sword, the sword and

buckler, and above all that exquisite invention of God, the nimble rapier of Ferrara steel, with the nice mastery of an old honest blade, but in thy service, thou sweet baggage with thy moist lip and thy enkindling eye ? "

" Ah ! Sir Englishman," cried I, feeling, in spite of his rough brogue, the music of his nature, " I love to hear you speak thus."

" Thirty years have I been at the trade, good Spaniard, and sooner than change it I would die. One hundred towns have I sacked ; ten fortunes have I plundered. But by sack they came, and by sack they did depart. It is wonderful how a great nature has a love of sack. Yet I have but my nose to show for my passion. Do you observe its prominent hue, which by night is so luminous that it flames like a beacon to forewarn the honest mariner ? Yet to Fortune will we wet our beards, good Spaniard, for we of England court her like a maiden with a dimple in her cheek."

Having concluded this declamation, Sir Richard Pendragon called the landlord in a tone like thunder, bade him bring a cup of sherry for my use, and fill up his own, which was passing empty.

" I will bear the charges, lousy one," said Sir Richard with great magnificence.

" Oh yes, your worship "—the poor innkeeper was as pale as a corpse—" but there is already such a score against your worship—"

" Score, you knave ! " Sir Richard rolled his eyes horribly. " Why, if I were not so gentle as a woman I would cut your throat. Score, you

dog! Then have you no true sense of delicacy? Now I would ask you, you undershot ruffian with your bleared eyes and your soft chaps, are gentlemen when they sit honouring their mistresses in their own private tavern, are they to be crossed in their sentiments by the lowest order of man? Produce me two pots of sack this minute, or by this hand I will cut a gash in your neck."

The unlucky wight had fled ere his guest had got half through this speech, which even in my ears was frightful, with such roars of fury was it given. When he returned with two more cups filled with wine Sir Richard looked towards me and laid his finger to the side of his nose, as though to suggest that he yielded to no man in the handling of an innkeeper.

By the time he had drunk this excellent liquor there came a sensible change in the Englishman's mien. The poetry of his mood, which had led him to speak of Fortune in terms to kindle the soul, yielded to one more fit for common affairs.

"Having lain in my castle," said he, "and being well nourished with sack, to-morrow I start on my travels again. Upon pressure I would not mind taking a young squire."

He favoured me with a look of a very scarching character.

"I say," he repeated solemnly, stretching out his enormous legs, "I am minded to take a young squire."

"In what, sir, would his duties consist?"

"They would be mild, good Don. Assuming that this young squire—if he were a man of birth

so much the better—paid me a hundred crowns a year, cleaned my horse of a morning and conversed with me pleasantly in the afternoon, I would undertake to teach him the world."

"Why, sir," said I, "surely it would be more fitting if your squire received one hundred crowns from you annually, which might stand as his emolument."

"Emolument!" said the Englishman, stroking his beard. "One hundred crowns. These be very quaint ideas."

"Why, sir," said I, with something of that perspicacity for which our province is famous, "would not your squire have duties to perform, and would they not be worthy of remuneration?"

"Duties!—remuneration!" said the Englishman, stroking his beard furiously. "Why, can you not know, good Don, I am in the habit of receiving a thousand guilders per annum for teaching the world to sons of the nobility?"

"Indeed, sir! can a knowledge of the world be of so much worth?"

The Englishman roared at that which he took for my simplicity.

"By my soul!" he exclaimed, "a knowledge of the world is a most desperate science. I have met many learned men in my travels, but that science always beat them. Cæsar was a learned man, but he would have had fewer holes in his doublet had he gone to school earlier. It is a deep science, my son; it is the deepest science of all. What do you know of deceit, my son, you who have never

left your native mountains before this morning? You, with the dust of your rustic province upon your boots, what do you know of those who hold you in fair speaking that they may know the better where to put the knife?"

"I confess, sir, I have thought but little of these things," I said humbly, for my misadventure with the beggar woman was still in my mind, and my mother's ring was no longer in the keeping of her only son.

"Then you will do well to think upon it, my young companion," said the Englishman, regarding me with his great red eyes. "You talk of fortune, Spaniard, you who have yet to move ten leagues into the world! Why, this is harebrained madness. You who have not even heard of the famous city of London and the great English nation, might easily fall in with a robber, or be most damnably cheated in a civil affair. Why, you who say 'If you please' to an innkeeper might easily lose your purse."

"I may be ill found in knowledge, sir, but I hope my sword is worthy," said I, determined that none should contemn my valour, even if my poor mind was to be sneered at.

"Oh, so you hope your sword is worthy, do you now?" The Englishman chuckled furiously as if moved by a conceit. "Well, Master No-Beard, that is a good accomplishment to carry, and I suspect that you may find it so one of these nights when there is no moon."

All the same Sir Richard Pendragon continued to laugh in his dry manner, and fell again to look-

ing at me sideways. For my life I could not see where was the occasion for so much levity.

"My father has taught me the use of the sword," said I.

"Oh, so your father has taught you the use of the sword! Well, to judge by the length of your beard, good Don, I am inclined to suspect that your father had a worthy pupil."

"I hope I may say so."

"Oh, so you hope you may say so, my son! Well, now, I think you may take it, good Don, from one who has grown old in the love of virtue, that your father would know as much of the sword as a burgomaster knows of phlebotomy. You see, having had his right hand struck off in battle at a tender age, unless he happened to be a most infernally dexterous fellow he forfeited his only means of becoming a learned practitioner."

The Englishman laughed in his belly.

"My father had excellent precept," said I, "although, as you say, the Hand of God curtailed his practice."

"Well, now, my son," said Sir Richard Pendragon, assuming a grave air, which yet did not appear a very sincere one, "he who speaks you is one whose practice the Hand of God has not curtailed. He was proficient with sword and basket in his tenderest infancy. He has played with all the first masters in Europe; he has made it a life study. With all the true principles of this inimitable art he is familiar. He has been complimented upon his talent and genius, natural and acquired, by those

whom modesty forbids him to name. And all these stores, my worthy Don, of experience, ensample, and good wit are at your command for the ridiculous sum of an hundred crowns."

"I have not an hundred crowns in the world, sir," I confessed with reluctancy, for his arguments were masterful.

"By cock!" he snarled, "that is just as I suspected."

There could be no mistaking the change in his demeanour when I made this unhappy confession. It caused him to resolve his gross and rough features into some form of contemplation. At last he said, with an eye that was like a weasel's,—

"What is the sum in your poke, good Spaniard?"

"I have but eight crowns."

"Eight crowns! Why, to hear your conversation one would think you owned a province."

"A good sword, a devout heart, and the precepts of my noble father must serve, sir, as my kingdom," said I, hurt not a little at the remarkable change that had come over him.

"I myself," said he, "have always been governor and viceregent of that kingdom, and had it not been for a love of canaries in my youth, which in my middle years has yielded to a love of sherris, I must have administered it well. But there is also this essential divergence in our conditions, my son. I am one of bone and sinew, an Englishman, therefore one of Nature's first works; whereas you, good Don, saving your worshipful presence, are but a mincing and turgid fellow, as thick in the brains

as a heifer, and as yellow in the complexion as a toad under his belly. Your mind has been so depressed by provincial ideas, and your stature so wizened by the sun, that to a liberal purview they seem nowise superior to a maggot in a fig, or a blue-bottle fly in the window of a village alehouse."

"Sir Englishman," said I haughtily, for since I had told him I had but eight crowns in the world his manner of speaking had grown intolerable, "I do not doubt that among your own nation you are a person of merit, but it would not come amiss if you understood that you pay your addresses to a hidalgo of Spain. And I must crave leave to assure you that in his eyes one of your nation is but little superior to a heathen Arab who is as black as a coal. At least, I have always understood my father, God keep him! to say this."

"By my faith, then," said the Englishman, "even for a Spaniard your father must have been very ill-informed."

"Sir Richard Pendragon," said I sternly, "I would have you be wary of the manner in which you mention my father."

"I pray you, brother, do not make me laugh." Again he trained his sidelong look upon me. "I have such an immoderately nimble humour—it has ever been the curse of my family from mother to daughter, from father to son—as doth cause the blood to commit all manner of outrages upon mine old head veins. All my ancestors died of a fluxion that did not die of steel. But I tell you, Spaniard, it is as plain as my hand that your father

must have been a half-witted fellow to beget such a poor son."

"Sir Richard Pendragon," I cried, incensed beyond endurance, "if you abuse my father I will run you through the heart!"

"Well," said he, "this is good speaking on eight crowns, a provincial accent, and a piece of rusty iron which is fitter to toast half a saddle of mutton than to enhance the scabbard of a gentleman. And if you make this speaking good, why, it will be still better. For this is a very high standard, brother, you are setting up, and I doubt me grievously whether even the Preux Chevalier would be able to maintain it."

He concluded with such an insolent and unexpected roar of laughter as made me grow furious.

"I would have you beware, sir!" I cried. "Were you twice as gross in your stature and three times as rude, I run you through the heart if again you contemn the unsullied name of my noble father."

"Your father was one-handed," said this gigantical ruffian, looking at me steadily. "He was as stupid in his wits as a Spanish mule, and I spit in the face of the unbearded child that bears his name."

CHAPTER VI.

OF A PRIVATE BRAWL. I TAKE PROFIT AT THE COST OF REPUTATION.

BEFORE I could draw my sword my challenger was on his feet, had kicked away the stool on which he had sat, and had bared his own weapon. I was so overcome with fury that I could not stay to mark his enormous stature, yet his head seemed to live among the hams in the roof.

This was the first occasion I had drawn my sword in a quarrel, but I needed to ask no better. The pure reputation of this noble heart I was defending nerved my right arm with unimaginable strength. Besides, I was twenty-one years old, well grown and nourished for one of my nation. My blade was of an ancient pattern, but a true Toledo of the first quality, and many high deeds of the field had been wrought thereby. The Englishman towered above me in the extremity of his stature, but had he been of twice that assemblance, in my present mood I would not have feared him. For, as I was fain to believe, some of the hardiest fighting blood of our northern provinces was in my veins. This was my first duello; but you must not forget, reader, that my father had instructed me how to bear my point, how to thrust, how to receive, and, above all, how to conduct the wrist as laid down by the foremost practice.

We spent little time in courtesies, for my anger

would not permit them. At once I ran in upon my adversary, thrusting straight at his heart. Yet he received my sword on his own with a skill that was truly wonderful, and turned it aside with ease. All the power I possessed was behind it, yet he cast it off almost as complacently as if he had been brushing away a mosquito. The sting of this failure and his air of disdain caused me to spring at him like a cat, yet, I grieve to say, without its wariness, for, do what I would, I was unable to come near him. He saved every stroke with a most marvellous blade, not once moving his wrist or changing his posture. After this action had proceeded for some minutes I was compelled to draw off to fetch my breath; whereon said my adversary with a snarl of contempt that hurt me more than my incompetence :—

"I wish, my son, you would help me to pass the time of the day."

My instant response was a most furious slash at his head, although it is proper to mention that this method was not recommended in the rules of the art as expounded by the illustrious Don Ygnacio. But I grieve to confess that rage had overmastered me. Yet Sir Richard Pendragon evaded this blow as dexterously as he had evaded the others.

"Come, brother," he said; "even for a Spaniard this is futility. This is no more than knife work. I am persuaded your father was a butcher, and owed his entire practice to the loins of the Galician hog."

Such derision galled me worse than a thrust from his sword. Casting away all discretion I ran in upon him blindly, for at that moment I was minded to make an end one way or another.

"Worse and worse," said he. "You bear your blade like a clergyman's daughter. Still, do not despair, my young companion; perhaps you will make better practice for my left hand."

As he spoke, to my dismay he changed his weapon from his right hand to his left, and parried me with the same contemptuous dexterity. Suddenly he made a strong parade, and in the next instant I felt the point of his sword at my breast.

"Your father must have been a strangely ignorant man, even for a Spaniard," he said. "I do not wonder that he lost his right hand at an early age. You have as little defence as a notorious cutpurse on his trial. Any time these five minutes you must have been slain."

Then it was I closed my eyes in the extremity of shame and never expected to open them again. But to my astonishment the forces of nature continued to operate, and soon, in a vertigo of fear and anger, I was fain to look for the cause. It seemed that my enemy had lowered his point and drawn off. Plainly he intended to use me as a cat uses a mouse, for his private pleasure. For that reason I fell the harder upon him, since I knew my life to be forfeit, and I had an instinct that the more furiously it was yielded the less should I know of a horrid end.

"I will now slit your doublet, my son," said Sir

Richard Pendragon. "Have you a favourite rib you would care to select? What of the fifth?"

Without more ado he began cutting my doublet with a dexterity that was amazing. His point flashed here and there across my breast and seemed to touch it in a thousand places; yet, although the old leather was pierced continually, no hap was suffered by my skin.

"If only I had my lighter and more fanciful blade of Ferrara here," he said in the midst of a thousand fanfaronades and brandishments, "I would flick every button off your doublet so nicely as a tailor."

"Kill me!" I cried, flinging myself upon his blade.

I made such a terrific sweep with my sword that it whistled through the air, and was like to cut off his head. Instead, however, of allowing it to do so, he met it with a curious turn of the wrist, and the weapon was hurled from my grasp.

As I stood before him panting and dishevelled, and young in the veins and full in them too, I seemed to care no more than a flake of snow for what was about to occur. I could but feel that I had traduced my father's reputation, and had cast a grievous slur upon his precept. The blood was darkening my eyes and singing in my ears, but quite strangely I was not minding the blade of my enemy. That which was uppermost in my mind was the landlord's opinion that he was the Devil in Person.

Upon striking my sword to the ground he bade me remark his method of disarmament.

"It approaches perfection so nearly," said he, "as aught can that is the offspring of the imperfection of man. It is the fruit of a virtuous maturity; it is the crown of artifice; consider all the rest as nought. For I do tell thee, Spaniard, this piece of espièglerie, as they say at Paris, divides one of God's own good swordsmen from the vulgar herd of tuck-pushers or the commonalty. And, mark you, it was all done with the left hand."

While awaiting with as much composure as I could summon that stroke which was to put me out of life, there happened a strange thing. There had come into the room, unobserved by us both, the tap-wench to the inn. And in a moment, seeing what was toward, this brave little creature, not much bigger than a stool, and as handsome and flashing a quean as ever I saw, ran between me and the sword of my adversary.

"Hold, you bloody foreign man!" she cried imperiously.

"Nay, hold yourself, you neat imp," said the Englishman, catching her round the middle by his right arm, and lightly hoisting her a dozen paces as though she had been a sack of feathers. Yet he had made but a poor reckoning if he thought he could thus dispose of this fearless thing. For his wine cup, half full of sherry, which had been set in the chimney-place out of the way of hap, was to her hand. She picked it up, and hurled the pot and its contents full in the face of the giant.

"Take it, you wicked piece of villainy!" she cried.

Now, by a singular mischance the edge of the cup struck Sir Richard Pendragon on the forehead. It caused a wound so deep that his blood was mingled with the excellent wine. Together they flowed into his eyes and down his cheeks, and so profusely that they stained his doublet and dripped upon the floor. And the courageous girl, seeing my enemy's discomfiture, for what with the liquor and what with his gore he was almost blind for the nonce, she darted across the room and picked up my sword. With a most valiant eagerness she pressed it into my hand.

"Now, young señor gentleman, quick, quick!" she cried. "Have at him and make an end of him!"

"Alack, you good soul," said I, "this cannot be. I am the lawful price of my adversary. God go with you, you kind thing."

I cast the sword to the ground.

"Then oh, young master, you are a very fool." Tears sprang to the eyes of the honest girl and quenched her fiery glances.

However, so dauntless was the creature in my cause that she picked up my sword again, and crying, "I myself will do it, señor," actually had at the English barbarian with the greatest imaginable valiancy.

In the meantime the giant had been roaring at his own predicament in the most immoderate fashion. For, on feeling his head, and discovering that the stream that trickled into his eyes was a compound of elements so delectable, he cast forth

his tongue at it in a highly whimsical manner, and drew as much into his mouth as he could obtain.

"I have my errors," he cried, rocking with mirth; "but if a wanton disregard of God's honest sherris be there among, when he dies may this ruby-coloured one be called to the land of the eternal drought. Jesu! what a body this Pendragon azure gives it. 'Tis choicer than Tokay out of the skull of a Mohammedan. When the hour comes to invest me in my shell, I will get me a tun of sherris and sever a main artery, and I will perish by mine own suction."

He had scarcely concluded these comments when the brave little maid had at him with my sword. Expecting no such demonstration on the part of one not much taller than his leg, it needed all his adroitness of foot, which for one of his stature was indeed surprising, to save the steel from his ribs. And so set was the creature on making an end of him that the force with which she dashed at his huge form, and yet missed it, carried her completely – beyond her balance. With another of his mighty roars, the English giant seized her by the nape with his right hand, and held her up in the air by the scruff, so curiously as if she had been a fierce little cat that had flown at him.

"Why, thou small spitfire," he said, "thou art even too slight to be cracked under mine heel. Thou pretty devil, I will buss thee."

"I will bite off the end of your nose, you bloody-minded villain," cried the little wench, struggling frantically in his gripe.

"Nay, why this enmity, pretty titmouse," said the giant, "seeing that I have a mind to fondle thee for thy valour?"

"You would slay the young gentleman señor, you wicked cut-throat villain, you!"

"Nay, by my hand I will not, if you will give me twenty honest busses, you neat imp, to heal my contusion."

"You swear, Englishman, upon your wicked beard, the young señor gentleman shall come to no hurt if I kiss you?"

"I will swear, thou nice hussy, by the bones of all my ancestors in their Cornish cemetery, that young Don Cock-a-hoop shall go uncorrected for all his sauciness and pretension. With eight crowns in his wallet and a most unfathomable ignorance he drew his tuck on a right Pendragon. But so much effrontery shall go unvisited, mark you, at the price of twenty honest busses from those perfect lips of thine. If thou art not the most perfect thing in Spain, I am little better than a swaggerer."

"Put me down then, Englishman," said the little wench as boldly as an ambassador; "and do you give the young gentleman señor his sword."

"So I will; but I would have you remark it, pretty titmouse, that I will be embraced with all the valiancy of thy nature. Ten on each side of my royal chaps, and one for good kindness right i' th' middle."

"Give the young gentleman señor his sword, then, you English villain."

So had this matter accosted the humour of Sir Richard Pendragon that he obeyed her.

"Take it, young Spaniard," said he with a magnificent air; "and do you consider it as your first lesson in the affairs of the world. I do perceive two precepts to whose attention your noble father does not appear to have directed you. The first is, never draw upon the premier swordsman of his age, so long as life hath any savour in it; and for the other, never lack the favour of a farthingale. Do I speak sooth, good girl?"

"Yes, you do, you large villain," said the little creature, with her two fierce eyes as black as sloes. "And now I will kiss you quickly, so that I may have done. I shall scarcely be able to chew so much as a piece of soft cheese for a month after it."

The Englishman seated himself upon his stool, and set her upon his knees.

"Begin upon the right, my pretty she, slowly, purposefully, and with valiancy. I would as lief have your lips as a bombard of sherris. If it were not for one Betty Tucker, a dainty piece at the 'Knight in Armour' public-house hard by to the town of Barnet, in the kingdom of Great Britain, I would bear you at my saddle-bow all the way back to our little England, and marry you at the church of Saint Clement the Dane, which is in London city. For next to sack I love valour, and next to valour I love my soul. Now then, thou nice miniard, I must taste thy lips softly, courteously, but yet with valiancy as becomes thy disposition."

It was never my fortune to behold a sight more whimsical than that of this monstrous fellow seated with the blood still strickling down to his chin, while this little black-eyed wench, not much bigger than his fist, with her skin the colour of a walnut, her hair hanging loose, and her rough clothes stained and in tatters, dealt out her kisses first to one side of his ugly mouth and then to the other, yet making as she did so lively gestures of disgust.

"Courteously, courteously!" cried the giant. "Let us have no unmannerly haste in this operation, or I will have them all over again."

"Nay, you shall not; I will take heed of that. That is fifteen. Another ten, you foreign villain, would give me a canker in my front teeth."

"Nay, that is but fourteen, my pretty mouse. Here we have the fifteenth. Courteously, courteously, do I not tell thee. See to it that it is so long drawn out that I may count nine."

"There's twenty, you large villain!" cried the little creature in huge disgust, and slipping off his knee as quickly as a lizard.

"Aye, but where's the lucky one, the one right i' th' middle, that I was to have for good fellowship?"

"It was not in the terms, and I will not give it thee."

"Not in the terms, pretty titmouse! By my hand I will not be cozened in this manner."

The little creature scuttled away like a rat, but the giant had his hands on her before she could get to the door.

"Now for the lucky one, thou sweet hellicat, the one right i' th' middle," cried he, swinging her up to him as though she had been a squirrel.

"Unhand me, foreign dog!" she cried, with a snort of defiance, "else I will bite thee in the cheek."

"Do thou, sweet adder, for I love thee."

"There, you large villain!"

She darted her strong teeth, flashing with whiteness, at him, and he dropped her with an oath, as though she had been a snake. She made off out of doors as nimbly as a cat, leaving the astonished giant to staunch yet another wound she had dealt him.

"By my soul"—he pressed his hands to his ribs and his face grew empurpled with his roars—"I have the greatest mind in the world to marry that pretty doxey."

CHAPTER VII.

OF THE DISABILITIES THAT ATTEND ON GENTLE BIRTH.

"Sir Richard Pendragon," said I, when at last the immoderation of his mirth would permit me to address him, "I make you my service. I owe it to your clemency that I retain my life."

"My young companion," said he, "I pray you not to mention so small an affair. I did but require a little exercise for mine arm. I had no mind whatever to slay you."

"I am afraid, Sir Richard," I confessed, "that in my heat I would have slain you readily had it but lain in my power."

"Well, well," said this remarkable man, with a magnanimity for which I should have been the last to allow him the credit, "in our heats and violences even we strong minds are like to commit that from which in soberness we should refrain. I remember discoursing upon this point with the Crown Prince of Bohemia. 'Charles,' said I—there was ever a great familiarity between us—'Charles,' said I, 'I would slay no man in a private quarrel unless he were a villain.' 'Not even if he had sworn to slay you, my illustrious friend?' said the Crown Prince. 'No, Charles,' said I. 'The truly illustrious are the truly magnanimous.' 'The sentiment is fine, good coz,' said the heir to the throne. 'There speaks a great folly or a great nature.' Now, my young companion, which cap is it that fits the first-born son of a sainted English lady?"

"I believe you to be a good man, Sir Englishman. I know you are a great swordsman; and also you appear to have an excellent knowledge of the world. I make you my service."

"These are honest words," said he. "I wish you had an hundred crowns; you would make a good appearance as my squire. You would be able to clean my horse as well as another, and polish my spurs, and in return I would advise you in the use of the sword, the broadsword, and, above all, the noblest of God's implements—the Italian rapier."

"I would that I had, sir, for it would seem that I have but slight pretension to the handling of these weapons. And methinks that here is an art in which a man must aspire to excellence if he is to win his way to fortune in a time so perilous."

"You speak sooth, my son. A pedigree will bring no advancement to virtue in these evil times unless it is accompanied by a bit of shrewd steel and a deft wrist to push home its modest claims. But I grieve to say, good Don, that I never met a more disappointing blade. Had you never borne it before in the cause of integrity?"

I confessed that I had not.

"Well, gossip, you must pass many a weary vigil ere you can win the mastery of this incomparable tool. But in spite of your nation, as I perceive you to be a youth of parts, I have a mind to put you in the way of the rudiments. My young son of the Spains, your peninsula is a foolish one; but, as I say, you are of good birth and your intentions are honourable—two vital particulars upon which my sainted mother was extremely nice. It will only be a little against me if I teach you the use of the sword. Give me those eight crowns and you shall be my squire."

He held out his hand for all I had in the world. Yet this was a matter for grave reflection. Poor as I was, and humbled in my thoughts, I was still a Spanish gentleman; and expert as was this Englishman with the sword, and finely as he was found in wisdom, he was yet one of another nation, and scarcely to be esquired by a blood like mine. My

condition was such that I could not give my service to one less in degree than a Spanish nobleman or one who was at least a prince in his own country; and although this Englishman had moved about the courts of Europe and Asia Minor, and the blood of kings flowed under his doublet, it was yet a parlous thing for my father's son, a veritable Sarda y Boegas, to attend him in a humble capacity.

"Why, brother," said Sir Richard Pendragon, "would you insult a generous nature with your reluctancy? Is not the suggestion a noble one? Is it not princely? Have I not peddled a great mind about Europe for thirty years in the mild pursuit of knowledge, and do I not place at your service the whole store of my politeness for the paltry sum of eight crowns? Yet was I ever immoderate in the love of worth. My young Spaniard, I have conceived a deep regard for your character. Besides, I am in need of a squire, and between you and me and the door, eight crowns will not come amiss."

So much fair and honourable speaking upon the part of the Englishman caused me to take most earnest thought. But at last with a proper submission, for the offer was fine from a swordsman so notable, I felt I must deny him.

"I thank you from the heart, sir, for such fair words, proceeding as they do from a man of learning and genius, but I fear I must seek my fortune alone. My condition renders it necessary that the person I serve be not less in degree than one of the Spanish nobility."

"By cock!" he cried, "is not a Pendragon worthy? Can you be unacquainted with the fact that a king's blood flows under every doublet of that name?"

"It is not the blood of a king of Spain, and therefore, good Englishman, though I like you well, I fear I cannot attend you."

I think my words must have worked on this mad fellow—since I have come to know the world better I have learned that all Englishmen are mad—for he put by his indignation, looked at me with immense solemnity, and teased his short chin beard.

"So be it, my young companion. You are a man of birth, and in every country under the stars a chip of that quality must be allowed his maggot. Blood is blood wherever it flows, whether it is in Arabia sitting in a mosque without its shoes, or whether it is in England, drinking malmsey and eating walnuts with the Heir Apparent. I myself am of that condition, and therefore, good Spaniard, none is better acquainted with those immodest fancies that vex the minds of the nobly nurtured."

"These are good words, Sir Richard; and if my name were other than Miguel Jesus Maria de Sarda y Boegas I would ask no better master for my two hands and my faithful service."

"Well, Master Miguel Jesus Maria de Sarda y Boegas, I never heard such proud speaking on eight crowns before. If you had eight thousand I expect you would be a maker of ballads. But I am inclined to love you for it; and therefore out of a gentle feeling propose to teach you the use of the

sword. First, I would have you hand me your old tuck."

With a proper humility I gave him my sword.

"Why," said he, making divers sweeps and passes with it, "it would weary one of twice your stature. It would require the giant Cormoran to wield it delicately. It is a good thing but an ancient; it is at least an hundred years behind the age."

"My noble father gave it into my hand as death closed his eyes," said I, feeling my pride to be surmounting my humility.

"I expect your father was a very brave man, and as such I esteem him. All the same, I should say that the intellect was not more than half his estate."

"He was as wise a man as ever lived."

"As wise a Spaniard I make no doubt. But the really wise men live in England. It is also the home of the first swordsmen of the time. You see, Master Miguel, there is no true felicity in anything without true mind. That is why we English are so fortunate; we have the mind and therefore the felicity. Now, Master Miguel, I will show you how to fix your gripe upon your sword. The wrist must be free, and the arm must have good play."

For more than an hour this learned master expounded the rudiments of this weapon, which he swore by his beard I did not know. He declared that every one of my father's precepts, which I had to confess I had put to a poor use, would not have been new in the time of the Cid. And although I had a mind to dispute this contempt for my father's opinion, I did not venture, since I was quite unable

to support the precepts of my youth with any fair ensample. Indeed, only the highest presumption would have ventured to dispute with so arch a master of the noble weapon. There appeared to be nothing appertaining to its nature and conduct that he did not know. He said he had devoted his life to this study, and infinite practice, allied to the kindness of his stars, had given him an address that was incomparable.

There was one trick he performed which I often recall, with such wonder did it fill me. He took from a scabbard which he kept under his eye in the chimney corner, a long, fine, and tapering Italian rapier, which he declared was the most perfect and poetic thing of man's invention. With no other weapon than this, he met my own sword in such a fashion that, heavy as it was, it seemed but as a lath before it. Indeed I, its wielder, was unable to make the least advance therewith; and to my amazement, with the might of his arm and this thin piece of steel, he urged me before him all over the room. Afterwards he rolled up the sleeve of his doublet with an air of pride, and showed the contour of that enormous limb.

"Yet, Master Miguel," said he, "it is not brute strength that makes the man you behold. It is the deftness of the fingers in conjunction with the brain's agility."

By the time my lesson was concluded the sweat had sprung from every pore, and I was breathing heavily. On the contrary, the Englishman, who had exerted himself not less greatly, was untroubled

in any particular, save that of the throat, an inconvenience, however, which in his case seemed to be of a permanent character.

"These exercises," said he, "I perform every day to keep the limbs supple and the wrists responsive. Sometimes, if I feel especially valiant, I place an apple or an onion upon the head of the old bull frog of an innkeeper, and slice it in four quarters with my broadsword, and to observe him quake as if he had the ague is the most delectable sight. He is forever thinking that my honest blade will proceed too far, and cleave through his mind; and I conceive it to be my duty to assure him that he does well to show this concern, for sometimes accidents have been known to occur."

He then offered very courteously to perform a like action to an apple placed upon my own head. This, however, I declined with a courtesy which I hope was not less than his own.

Sir Richard Pendragon, having drunk copiously of his favourite beverage out of his favourite cup, and having insisted that I should follow his example, said:

"Master Miguel, in what part of the globe do you intend to adventure to-morrow with your noble eight crowns? They will not bear you above a thousand leagues; fortune does not grow on the bushes, according to all that I have heard about it; your stomach is too proud to take service with one who has the blood of kings flowing under his doublet; so it would seem that unless you bring your chaste mind to the nicking of purses and the cutting of throats, your body will starve."

"God forbid, sir! I have devices of my own. I mind me of one of the finest and most sententious of my father's precepts."

"Not of swordsmanship, I trust?"

"No, sir, of conduct."

"Not of conduct of the sword, Master Miguel Jesus Maria de Sarda y Boegas—how I love the sound of that name!—if I may put the question?"

"Not conduct of the sword, sir, conduct of the heart. My father's precept was this: 'In choosing him you shall serve, rather let it be some high lord or gentleman of birth, diminished in his fortune, or in some sort isolated from his right estate, for it is the cause of the weak that feeds the valiant.'"

It was pleasing to witness Sir Richard Pendragon nod his head in approval.

"That was well observed of your father, Master Miguel. I am rejoiced to notice that he knew a little more of mankind than he did of martial weapons. But, by my sooth, you will not need to look above a thousand leagues for this high lord or gentleman of birth, diminished in his fortune, or in some sort isolated from his right estate."

"I am well pleased," said I eagerly, "that he is so near at hand. Where may he be, good Englishman?"

"He sits before you, gentle Spaniard, sipping a quartern of sack out of a silver goblet on a three-legged stool."

"I would ask no better master, had the king's blood in his veins been a true Spanish colour."

"Well, every man to his taste," said he, looking

into his wine, "but you Spaniards are very mad fellows. The blood of Uthyr Pendragon, sire of Arthur, king and sovereign lord of Britain, not being to your mind, we must make abatement of this peninsularity of yours, and find some other."

"I would serve some Spanish gentleman of high degree, and if you can bring one to mind, Sir Englishman, who, diminished in his fortune, has a beauteous and enchanting daughter—"

"Oho! we have now in the case a beauteous and enchanting daughter! Is that another of your father's precepts, my son, or does it proceed out of your own wise pate?"

"The words of my father are these: 'Set your heart without haughtiness, but with bright ambition, upon some fair Spanish lady, one whose condition is the equal of her beauty, and whose figure in the world is of the first consideration, for so much superiority shall raise your spirit, my gentle kinsman, to vie with hers, and be, as it were, as that North Star that is fixed above the seas to point the course of fortune. And further, gentle kinsman, I append as follows: When your parts and situation are fit to vie with hers, the blood of a Sarda y Boegas shall make you the nuptial lord of this proud lady.'"

When I had given this further precept of my father's, the Englishman sat laughing into his hands.

"Why, this is the maddest fellow," he said, as if to himself; "yet I like to hear these notions of his, because there is a kind of poetry in them, and

there is no saying whither his maggot will be leading him next."

"I wish, sir, you could aid me in the quest of this nobleman I seek, and likewise of this beautiful and enchanting lady."

"What should English Dick know of these noblemen you seek, and these beautiful and enchanting ladies, you mad varlet?"

"You know the world so thoroughly. I believe you are acquainted with every blade of grass that grows in it, and you appear to be familiar with every person of the first consideration that inhabits it."

"The varlet is not so mad after all," he said, with a sleek air. "Now and again there is sooth in him, although the rascal is always flying off into such odd ideas. Yes, I am acquainted with the world a little, Don Miguel Jesus Maria de Sarda y Boegas—that name will be my doom!—and although I know hardly anything that is good of that part of it which is oddly called Spain—another most ridiculous sounding name to my mind!—I think I have heard of just the one person in it who will be the man for your services."

"A Spanish nobleman?"

"As full of nobility as a dog is of fleas. Quarterings I know not how many; and as proud as the Fiend."

"Of what degree, sir?"

"A duke, to be sure. Duke of Montesina—and as haughty as mine old and dear friend the Sophy."

"Is he diminished in his fortune, sir, and isolated from his right estate?"

"Yes, by my troth. He is as bankrupt in his substance as he is in his wit. Were he not well found in virtuous principles, he would be obliged to starve like a sparrow in a hard winter."

"And is this virtuous nobleman embroiled with an enemy?"

"Yes, good Don. He hath been embroiled this long while with the King of Castile, his covetous nephew and bitter foe, who seeks to add his fair castle and good lands above the city of Toledo to his own dominion. And I may tell you, Spaniard, this Castilian is like to do it, unless some wise and cunning hand arises to deny him, for that piece of old punctilio, who gets nearer to eighty every day, will soon be unable to fend him off."

"Can it be," I cried excitedly, "that Heaven has called me to be this same wise and cunning hand? This looks uncommonly like a providence."

"Oh, my dear Don Miguel!" exclaimed the Englishman, breaking forth into another of his mighty roars of laughter, "I pray you to take pity on these fluxions of mine. If one of these days you do not lay me stark dead of an apoplexy, there is not an ounce of king's blood in my nature."

"I am grievously surprised if my stars have not called me to some high destiny. Don Ygnacio, my father, declared as he lay dying that it was so."

"I do fear me then, good Don, this high destiny of yours will declare itself late in the day. You are as raw as a green pear. You must be set on

the chimney-piece to ripen before you can be considered as a table fruit."

"You wrong me, good Sir Richard. I am determined to prove myself as soon as another. I may have no mind for stratagem, but I shall not be afeared to draw my sword for this worthy but unfortunate grandee."

"O Jesu!" said the English giant, laughing into his hands softly, "I can feel this accursed fluxion mounting into my mind. I can see perfectly well, Master Miguel, if we go our ways together about this peninsula of yours, I shall be compelled to travel with a physician. Not afeared to draw your sword! Why, good Don, your sword is a lath, and he who draws it has not a hair to his chin, and cannot bleat so loud as a Barbary sheep."

"Deride me if you will, Sir Richard, but I will draw my sword for this grandee. Fortune has decreed it. And tell me, in addition to these misfortunes of his, hath he a daughter of a most surpassing fairness?"

"You can certainly count on his having a daughter. Dukes all the world over are notorious getters of wenches."

I asked the Englishman the reason of this phenomenon.

"It is a singular quality of their blood," he declared. "It loses its ambition and fills the world with farthingales."

"Indeed," said I, "is that the case? But it doth truly appear that this virtuous Duke of Montesina was designed by Heaven that I might fulfil my

father's behests. To-morrow, come what may, I will adventure towards his country; and as you would have me believe that he hath a daughter, I must hasten to appear before her."

"A pitiless old hag of sixty, I dare swear," cried Sir Richard Pendragon. "There will not be a tooth in her mouth. But now you have put me in mind of this duke, young sirrah, I think I will adventure thither myself. For, upon my life, I have a crow to pluck with this King John of Castile. I mind me it is high time I put paid to a score I owe him."

"Wherefore, Sir Richard?"

"Wherefore, my son? 'Tis but a year ago he threw the last of the Pendragons into a dungeon; and had it not been for the ready contrivance of that meritorious mind in scraping a hole through the wall with a nail out of his shoe, he would have ceased to drink sack this twelvemonth. Yes, Spaniardo, it was a most villainous matter, and it is certainly time I put it in order."

"If I may ride with you, sir, I shall count it a proud day," said I, making a low bow; for this strange man, with all his quiddity, was one whose company was to be esteemed in an early adventure into the world.

"You shall, good Don," said he, smiling upon me with much civility. "And now let us draw our cloaks about us and creep into the chimney-place, and sleep the sleep of those who addict themselves to virtue. You take one corner and I will take the other; and let us pray that we

sleep like doom, for I tell you, brother, it is a long and hard journey to Toledo."

Seeing him quaff the final dregs in his monstrous cup, which of late had begun to thicken his speech a little, seeing him wrap his cloak about him and otherwise suit his action to his words, I was fain to imitate him in these particulars. Nestling into the warm corner of the chimney, for after the heat of the day the northern night was cold, fatigue overcame me at once, and I fell into a profound and delicious sleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

OF A GREAT CALAMITY.

I HAD not even time to mutter my prayers, which, considering what lay before me, were never so sorely needed, ere I was in a sweet oblivion. Upon returning from this pleasant bourne a joyful sense of refreshment stole over my veins, for my slumber had been dreamless, and for several hours the sun had been in attendance on the morning.

The first thing I observed was my companion of the previous night. He was seated on his stool, and was blowing with his mouth upon a basin of porridge.

"Landlord," I heard him roar, "if you do not bring me a cup of sack to cool my throat, which I have blistered already with your damnable gruel, the worms will have fresh meat in their larder."

He pointed this threat by thrusting his dagger into the loose earth which formed the floor.

"Ha! Spaniardo," said he, observing that I had opened my eyes, "do I perceive you to be awake already? You have slept round the clock. What a notable gift is that of youth."

"I give you good morrow, Sir Richard Pendragon," said I, rubbing the sleep out of my eyes and slowly recalling my situation.

Hardly had I done so than I remembered that eight crowns was my fortune, in an old piece of goatskin. Instantly I pressed my hand where I had placed it last. How shall I record the terrible pang that seized me when I pressed and felt in vain.

I got up and looked all about my corner; looked under the settle on which I had lain; examined the dry earth which composed the floor; felt in all my pockets yet again, and even groped among the ashes of the newly kindled fire. But my purse was not. I cannot tell you what a desperate pang overcame me when I discovered that I was bereft of every maravedi I had in the world.

By the time I had concluded these investigations the Englishman, who had been far too much employed with his breakfast to heed these actions, had taken himself off out of doors. I was glad to find him gone; and I proceeded to conduct my search in every corner of the place, in the vain hope that it had fallen from me in those energetic passages of the previous night. But I should have done as well to look in a sandpit for a precious stone.

I was standing with my hands tucked in my doublet, and trying ruefully enough to confront my position, when the innkeeper entered. I was hungry, yet I had no money with which to purchase a breakfast. Further, I had not a friend; I had not a home; I was in a country as foreign to me as a distant land; and I hardly dared in this predicament to turn to a stranger to crave a word of kindness. And now did I feel so tender in my years, and so plainly did I discern that my experience of mankind was insufficient for my needs, that even as I stood I felt despair spread over me in a manner that I should have thought impossible. So far was I from my valiancy of the previous evening that I nearly shed tears before the innkeeper when I mentioned to him my loss.

Now here you shall mark the difference between a man who has breeding and a man who has not. No sooner did I confide my loss to the innkeeper and that I was left as penniless as a beggar, than this notorious coward, who the previous night had called for my aid, pulled the wryest mouth I ever saw and looked upon me rudely.

"Does Pedro understand by this," he said in a desperate tone of injury, "that you will not pay him for your lodging and the quantities of wine and victual you had of him last night?

"Not *will not*, landlord—*cannot*," said I miserably, not having now the spirit to defend myself from his reproaches. "I grieve to say I have not so much as a penny in the world. The amount of my score must stand as a loan you have made

to me, and I will not sleep of a night until you are repaid. I will charter a messenger to bring you your just due as soon as I can obtain it."

"Why, what words are these?" the innkeeper whined. "Loan—sleep of a night—a messenger! Oh, by the Virgin Mary, I have been robbed and cheated! Look here, you who pretend to be a gentleman, I will have it out of you. Pedro has been mishandled by such as you before this morning. And oh, good Our Lady, how he did cozen you, Pedro, when you told of this foreign cutthroat who for three weeks has used you the same."

It made my ear burn, reader, that I, Miguel Jesus Maria de Sarda y Boegas, of the sangre azul of my native Asturias, should stand before this common fellow in the light of a rogue. Yet in spite of the innkeeper's hard words I strove to bear myself with patience and dignity, for it was ever my father's opinion that Fortune is a capricious mistress, who will oft humiliate her wooers not so much to do them hurt, but to make proper trial of their fortitude. Yet it was not my spirit alone that was to be vexed in this affair; my body was to be mortified also. Having slept many hours, and being in the flush of a vigorous youth, I grew bitterly hungry.

"Not a sip, not a crumb," snarled the landlord, when I asked modestly enough that my breakfast and that of my horse might be scored up with the rest.

Now here it was that the brave little serving-

wench, who the previous evening had saved my life, came up to her master.

"Give the young gentleman his wine and his porridge," said she, "and, master, I myself will bear his charges."

"You, good wench!" I asked incredulously, for she was so ragged that she looked in worse case than myself.

"Yes, young gentleman, I can pay," she answered proudly. "I make it a practice to save a hundred maravedis of my wages a year."

"Very well then, Casilda," said the innkeeper. "Fetch me fifty of your maravedis, and you may bring this young rogue his breakfast. But you are a little fool, I say, for he is but a travelling cheat who will never repay you."

No sooner had her master spoken thus to my disparagement than the kindly creature, who was really very handsome if you will believe me, reader, stood up most majestically upon all her few inches, and said like a little queen,—

"Shame upon you, master! He is no cheat, but a very gentleman, with the sweetest face and an honest and kind expression, just like Victor, our old mule. I would trust him to the utmost of my wages; and if I do not see my money again, I shall know that fortune has used him ill."

It touched me to the soul to hear this rude and tattered little creature speak up for me like this—for me, a beggar, without a friend in the whole of the world. There was no reason, except that furnished by a kind heart, why she should

confide her savings to one unknown to her, one from whom all things were averse.

While I ate my breakfast with not so good a relish as I had expected, I could not but meditate upon so much goodness proceeding out of a low condition, and, further, upon the humiliation of my state. I had not got through with this food for the mind when the Englishman entered, and in great sickness of the spirit I asked him how far it was to Toledo.

"An hundred leagues or so," he said lightly, as though such a journey was no great affair.

I felt my heart sink. My beggary began to oppress me like a distemper, for how was I to win to such a distant place without so much as a piece of silver in my coat? Wherefore, with many misgivings and with deep discomfiture, I laid my case before him. And I asked counsel of him, for in spite of his mad humours, for which his nation was to blame, he was a man of birth, a man of excellent native shrewdness, and he knew the world.

When I told him of my pass, he blinked his eyes a good deal, rubbed his chin, and held his jaw in his hand with an air of deep perplexity.

"This is a devil of a matter," he said very gravely. "You would not suppose, Master Miguel, that this purse of yours took to itself a pair of legs, walked out of your pocket, and started out into the desert to admire the scenery?"

"I fail to see how it could do so."

"I share your opinion, good Don; therefore

I adjudge the landlord, who is a scurvy fellow, to have picked it out of your pocket as you lay asleep."

"Ah, no," said I; "the unhappy man is sorely afflicted at the loss. I cannot pay my score, and he has accused me of not having had the money at all."

"Has he so?" said Sir Richard Pendragon. "That sounds like a deep rascal. I am convinced this accursed innkeeper has the eye of a picker and stealer."

"I pray you, sir, not to accuse the poor man. I feel sure he would not stoop to such an act, and already he has been misused grievously."

"Well, good Don, if you are clear as to his innocence—and I am not sure of it myself—and you really had this amount of money?"

"Oh yes, to be sure I had—it was my patrimony."

"And it did not walk out of the inn of itself, and that black-eyed little wench has not touched it—and though she's a rude quean I believe she would not—and there is no hole in your pocket—is it possible there is a hole in your pocket, good Don?"

"There is no hole in my pocket, sir."

"And there is no cat or dog about the premises; and the innkeeper, by an odd chance—for he is the first of his kidney that is—is an honest man—you have either mislaid your purse, good Don, you never had it, or as you lay asleep you must have dreamed of fortune and have swallowed it."

Although the Englishman's gravity was so admirable, it helped me but little; and when I got on my knees to creep all over the ground to seek for my treasure, and met all manner of filth by the way, he too began poking about with the point of his sword, yet met with no better success than did I.

"It is a case for a physician," he said, "for a man to dream of fortune, and in the unnatural excitation of his mind to swallow all his money."

"I know not what to do," said I miserably. "I have not a groat to take me to Toledo."

The Englishman rubbed his chin again; and this I observed was his habit when he thought heavily.

"This is indeed a devil of a matter," he said. "You see, if you had had a little money you could have been my squire and I could have borne you with me; but I do not see how one of my condition can take a squire into his service unless he receives a fee for so doing."

"Well, sir," I said, feeling that now no choice was left to me, "I am prepared to take service with you."

"Are you so?" said the Englishman, rubbing his chin harder than ever. "Yes, but you see, Master Miguel, a person of my quality does not receive a squire into his service for the love of his eyes."

"My blood, sir, is of the first condition," said I humbly. "My father's pedigree is contained in the archives of Simancas."

"Yes, fair shrew; but a pedigree will not grow

apples, as we say in our plain English manner. My own pedigree can be referred to between the hours of eleven and three at the Herald's College in the city of London; but I should not have got so much as a cup of sack by it unless it had been accompanied by a good sword. You see, Master Miguel, had you had an hundred crowns you might have borne your knee by my saddle and looked at the world; but since you have had the misfortune to swallow every silver piece in your possession, body of God!—to use a profane expression—I do not see what is to be done with you."

"Oh, sir," I said, oppressed with my despair, "I pray you to consider of my situation. Bear me with you to this duke you mention, and half of my first year's emolument shall be yours."

"Emolument! Why, my young companion, this duke is about as rich as yourself. Still, it is an offer that betrays an honourable disposition; and not being likely to receive anything more substantial in your present pass, I dare say it behoves me to take it, and prove myself not to be covetous. But all the same, Master Miguel, I could have wished you had had a little something to eke out your charges by the way, for I have noticed that living is very expensive in this part of the world."

In this manner I sealed the momentous compact to enter the service of the Englishman. You will readily conceive, good reader, that in this matter the choice was none of my own. Indeed, had I not gone forth in his company I might never have

come to the duke at all. And at least, although he was not of our peninsula, he was a man of birth, with a fine genius for the sword, and a deep acquaintance with the world. Yet I did not like to think what my father would have suffered could he have known of my case, and how such blood as his had come to be the body servant of one of a foreign nationality.

Shortly after this affair was settled we arranged to go upon our road, and I went forth to the stable to put the saddle on Babieca. As I made to do this, the Englishman called out to me in a loud and insolent tone such as would not have come amiss to a groom or a varlet,—

"Miguel, you had best put the saddle on my own horse also. Beware he does not bite you; he is as rude as a lion to all except his personal friends."

Upon the instant the blood sang in my ears to hear a stranger apply my baptismal name with such familiarity, and to such a tune, as though I were a menial. Indeed, it galled me so, that I drew back to remonstrate with him upon the matter, in order that a wrong impression of our relationship might not get abroad. But even in this pass I was able to reflect and was visited by wisdom. For what is manhood, and what is blood, and what is dignity that they must be asserted on the smallest occasion? "Knaves protest of their virtue too much, low persons of their condition," was a saying of Don Ygnacio's. Yet to prove that my thoughts had run in the mind of another, no sooner had I

come to the stable and had taken up the saddle of Babieca, perhaps with my head somewhat high and a proud consideration in my mien, than there came a rustle of the straw, and upon looking up I saw at my side that little wench who had already stood so much my friend.

"Will the gentleman señor let me do it?" she asked shyly. "I can see he is of that condition that ought never to saddle horses."

These words were spoken with such soft earnestness that quite a gentle beauty was thrown about this rustic creature.

"You are very kind, good girl, but as I am setting forth to bend the world to my devices, with my own two hands I must learn to do these things."

She lowered her looks, and said with a softness almost as of music, "My name is Casilda. If you could speak it once, young gentleman, before you go away for ever into the world, I would always remember you, for I have never seen such sweetness and kindness before."

There was such a strange breaking in her voice as thus she spoke that I felt a sinking of the heart; and looking down upon her I saw her little form was trembling through its rags, and that her black eyes were full of tears.

"Casilda," said I, with a pang which once only had I felt and that was as my father closed his eyes; "little Casilda, wherever I go, whether it be all over this great country of Spain, or even as far as foreign places, and even if I enter into wisdom

and riches, and I am called to sit with the great, so long as God allows me a memory I will never forget so much goodness as is yours. You are the friend that saved me from the sword; and now you see me without means and in despair you bring me your all and you stand my surety."

"These be true words, young gentleman," said she in a kind of modest joy, putting one foot in Babieca's stirrup that she might raise herself to look into my eyes. "You speak but your thoughts, sweet gentleman. And were I a proud lady and might wed you, I would choose your face before the King's, and I would cherish it beyond all my great possessions."

Upon such speaking I could not forbear to press this sweet little slattern to my bosom, and yielded my lips to the gentlest mouth that the night before had been so fierce in my service. And as my embrace fell about this lowly but honest creature the world itself took a fairer hue. This was a revelation of my father's wisdom. Harshness and unkindness were not the world's true condition.

The rough voice of the landlord was now calling Casilda lustily. But the little wench would not leave me until she had brought some oats for Babieca's breakfast, which otherwise the honest horse was like to go without. And even as she left the stable at last, crying, "Go with God, señor; my prayers and my constant heart are yours forever," she ran back again to whisper with the most urgent instancy, "Be wary, señor, of that foreign man. I would not have you trust

him at all. He is much less of a caballero than he speaks, and very much more of a thief."

I had to reprove the little quean for this counsel, lest I should prove untrue to my master's service. And although by this time the innkeeper was promising to visit her with a cudgel if she did not come to him directly, she ran back to me yet again, jumped into Babieca's stirrup, just like a cat, and snatched another embrace, declaring that in spite of every inkeeper in the world, her leave of me should be one of kindness.

These were almost my final passages at this inn, since in less than twenty minutes my new master and I were breasting our way to the south. Yet I mourn to tell you, reader, that as soon as we were in the saddle there came the bitter curses of the landlord to our ears. Neither of us had requited him with so much as a peseta in return for our benefits. But in this matter I must declare Sir Richard Pendragon to be by far the more reprehensible. He had dwelt full twenty nights under the roof-tree of this inn, whereas I had dwelt but one. Besides in his pouch was the wherewithal, but I regret to state that the inclination was not in his heart; whereas with me, as I will leave you to suppose, the contrary was the true state of the case.

Indeed, I learned that the Englishman had a conviction of a deep-seated sort upon this subject. For when I heard the innkeeper's outcry I felt unable to suffer it, and begged my companion to make me a loan of the amount of my score, that

my debt at least might be expunged. To the which he replied that I appeared to have an incredible ignorance of human nature, and the more particularly that part of it that included innkeepers. He said he would prefer to cast his money in the sea than put it to such misuse.

"To rise a little earlier than an innkeeper," said he, "is a civil practice and has the sanction of Heaven. I would have you to know, Miguel, that my hair has been bleached before its season for consideration of the poor souls that this monstrous race has brought to ruin. Young men, old men, virgins, widows, matrons, small children of both sexes—oh! I tell you, Miguel, to think of this breeds a dreadful sickness within me. I will always rise, please Heaven, a little earlier than an innkeeper, for this iniquitous tribe has been the sworn enemy of my family for a thousand years. Was it not the landlord of 'The Rook and Flatfish' in the Jewry, a little bald fellow with an eye like a kite, that mulcted my revered ancestor, Sir Andrew Pendragon, in the sum of two shillings and ninepence—think on it, good Don!—for a pint of sack and a gurnet when the true price was never more than twelvepence halfpenny in a time of famine. And this is only to mention one matter out of an hundred in that sort. Oh, believe me, Miguel, we Pendragons have suffered miserably at the hands of innkeepers all through the course of history; but if the present wearer of this name does not redress a few of these injustices, call him not a true man,

not a good fellow, but a rogue on whom the sun shines by courtesy."

I was glad to find that Sir Richard Pendragon had these deep reasons for his action in this affair. Evidently he had meditated to a purpose upon the subject, and in the name of his own race, of which he was the last representative, was determined to be avenged upon its hereditary foes.

As we continued our way across the sandy plain or desert, the heat grew so severe that in the afternoon we were compelled to seek the shade of the first tree that offered. Under this pleasant canopy of leaves Sir Richard flung himself prone, with his enormous length stretched out to the full, and a kerchief laid across his face to defend it from the flies. He soon fell to snoring in a furious manner. No repose came to me, however, for my strange situation ran in my mind continually, turning my thoughts into a queer sort of verigo which left me uncertain whether to be of good courage or to yield to despair.

CHAPTER IX.

OF OUR ROAD TO THE SOUTH.

When my companion awoke the sun was a little lower and we were able to pursue our journey. He discovered himself to be of a cheerful disposition, with a nimble fancy, and, for one of his nation, something of wit. He had also a lively imagina-

tion which on occasion grew quite delectable. Yet, being called to hold a subordinate place in his company, he allowed his humour to assume so rough an edge towards my country as was hardly to be borne by a true Iberian. He passed much of his time in reviling the land of Spain, swearing at everything in it, and drawing an unworthy comparison between this peninsula of ours and his distant England, for which I had his word that as a place of abode it was somewhat more desirable than paradise. Yet every now and again, just as I would be falling to consider how I could possibly suffer him further, he would break out into some odd history of his surprising deeds in many lands. And then to hear him speak of these adventures in his arch fashion, you would have thought such a valiant person had never walked the earth since Ruy Diaz.

That he was a man of a signal talent was published in his mien; that he was one of the first swordsmen of the age I had had the proof; yet I had but to attend his talk for half an hour in patience and approval, and with a regular nodding of the head, than he would be so carried beyond all latitude by the glamour of his own ideas, that he would ask me to believe that since he had been to Africa the Arabs and other dark men of that nation no longer addressed their prayers to the moon, but to one whom, he said, with a modest side-look, must remain without a name.

"A thousand pardons, good Sir Richard!" said I incredulously, "but I pray you to consider of your

suggestion. Are you not given to the practice of exaggeration ? "

He plucked at his beard when he discovered that the warmth of his fancy filled me with so much distrust.

" Well, you see, Miguel," said he, " if it comes to that, perhaps I am something of an exaggeration altogether. But at least I do not exaggerate half so much as nature hath exaggerated me. I am a yard and a half across and two yards and a quarter high."

" I am ready to believe, good Sir Richard, that a capacious mind goes with such an assemblance as yours."

" Aye, but there is not the worst of that matter. Such a parcel of the virtues wants a bucket of sack of a morning to keep it in health. And sack is such a notorious inflamer of the fancy that I sometimes break into poetry and all kinds of bombastical ideas. So, my son, I would not have you heed above half what I say."

It was in this easy fashion that we came to Antirun. The stars had long been shining in the wilderness, yet we arrived without ill hap and supped at the best inn in the place. But as there only chanced to be one it was also the worst; and doubtless I might have pointed a truer indication of its character had I described it as the latter. I shall never forget the abuse that Sir Richard Pendragon showered upon the landlord, and although the food was plenty and smoking hot and the wine was tolerable, he swore his constitution was ruined.

" This is a most damnable peninsula, no doubt

about that," said he as he proceeded to carve a great smoking turkey.

"Have you been long in our delectable land?" I asked, seeking to divert his mind from the innkeeper, who was as pale as a ghost.

"Three years and forty days," said he, "according to the calendar. But I think I ought to tell you, Spaniardo, that is just three years and forty days too many."

"I trust that is far from being the case."

"Yes, good Spaniardo, when I left the blessed island of England, where they eat asparagus on the first of March, I was a smiling and prosperous man; but now owing to this climate, my smile is hidden in my beard, while my prosperity has had too many Spanish flies upon it to be any longer a very prosperous affair."

"Doubtless, sir, you have not travelled into our fairest places?"

"I have travelled this peninsula of yours from Sagres to Perpinan, from Granada to the Asturias. And other than myself there only lives one person better able to offer an opinion of its sand, its flies, its pigs, its inns, its whims and whams, and its infamously dirty furniture."

"And who, sir, is he?"

"The Devil."

"Wherefore one of his infamous character?"

"The Devil made it."

"By my sooth that is what I can never believe."

"It is what the Scriptures inform us, Spaniard."

"Not so, by my faith."

"There can be no doubt upon that subject, my

son. Father Francis, who was apprenticed to book and scholarship in the prettiest monastery in Middlesex, and who reads Hebrew quite as well as I do myself, has assured me on several occasions that 'though the Scriptures aver that the Lord created the goodliness of earth and heaven in six days, Spain is not mentioned.' The which makes me to contend that as your land is not mentioned in Holy Writ, and as it differs so greatly from the goodliness of earth and heaven, as English rectitude differs from Spanish chastity, it must, having so many tarantulas, fops, flies, and Spaniards in it—and these latter, mark you, never use a word of honest London English in their lives—it must, I say, being so afflicted with such pestilence, be the invention of the Devil. And even for the Devil it was invented very poorly."

It was during our sojourn at this inn that we fell upon a wise course. The sun at noon had been so much our enemy in travelling that we derermined to pursue our journey to Toledo in the night. Thus riding under the coolness of the stars, we made good progress; and so happy were we in the ease and swiftness of this mode, that each afternoon we took a siesta apart from the heat of the day, and kept the road in the darkness.

We had hardly an adventure that was worthy of the name. Indeed the chief ones were those that Sir Richard saw in his imagination. For if he so much as observed a peasant sitting his ass and smiling peacefully, he would hold his sword arm ready, lest he should prove a robber in disguise.

"For I would have you to understand, good Miguel," said he, "you are the one inhabitant of this precious continent to whom I am not afeared to show my back."

"Then if you please," said I, "I would be well content if you make no exception in my favour; for I am convinced that the least of my countrymen are worthy of your trust."

"My young companion," said he, "I gather from your conversation that you claim no acquaintance with any land beyond your own cursed sandy peninsula."

"Indeed that is the case, sir, and with your leave I will never seek to dwell in one that is fairer."

"Alack! it is precisely here where your mind has gone amiss. I am convinced that were you only to set foot in England, you would take such a disgust of your native peninsularity as I have taken of it."

The love of my country incited me to a recollection of what my father had told me concerning this strange island of which Sir Richard Pendragon made such a boast.

"Does the sun shine overmuch in England?" I asked.

"Its natural resources are of such immensity," said the Englishman, "that we do not care to have the sun shine upon us more than nine weeks in the year. We like it to have freedom to visit barren lands like Spain. At Madrid you vain-glorious Spaniards showed me your tall spires and palaces glittering finely in this element; but that is no

more than the reflection of heaven after all. The sun you will notice is a part of the firmament, not of Spain. Now, in London, if a fog arises on us, that element is native to our island kingdom ; and though a modest thing in itself there is none to dispute with us for its possession. There you have the true sterling mettle of the English character."

" Well, Sir Richard," said I, being determined to challenge his swollen ideas of his nation to the best of my power ; " according to the ancient chronicles, the beauty of our Spanish ladies hath been sung by poets from the earliest times. Yet I could never hear that those of England were so celebrated."

" Thou never wilt, vainglorious one. Have I not told you that we English are the chastest people on the face of the globe ? But this is one of those matters of delicacy in which you people of a foreign nationality have not been bred to delight. In England the adorable fair are so jealous in reputation that they would blush to have their names abroad at the instance of a poet or any other rogue in a hose and jerkin. And as for beauty, my youthful Don, the virtue of an English maid breeds in her damask cheek the chaste tint of lilies, and therein is the fair reflection of her soul."

From this our discourse, reader, you will gather that although right was upon my side, by some odd flaw of my constitution I was unable to enforce it. This nimble-minded foreigner had always an answer to serve his occasion, which upon its face was so fair-seeming that it stood his need. But in many of his arguments he permitted himself such a noto-

rious subtlety that I could not but wonder how one who had taken virtue for his guide could walk upon paths so perilous.

It was seven o'clock of the morning of the fifth day of our journey that we came to Toledo. I shall ask those who have not seen it to believe that it is a wonderful fair city, and an honour to the land that made it so; while those who have will stand my surety, for I do not see how the eye of man can hold two views upon the subject. And I mention the noble grandeur of this city without any reference to my heart and sentiment, for, as you are presently to hear, I spent some of the darkest hours of my life behind its walls.

We halted at a large inn that lay between the mighty ancient palace of the Moors and the church of San Juan de los Reyes, and had an admirable breakfast. And we were in need of it, since we had been riding hard all night. Now, we had no sooner come to this inn, which was more considerable than any in which we had lain, than I was sensible of a change in the demeanour of my companion. In our journey through the wilderness he had conversed with me familiarly, had treated me as equal as in accordance with my birth; but no sooner were we come into this fair city and this good inn than he fell into hectoring speech, as though I were a menial, and whispered to me privily to call him my lord.

"But, Sir Richard Pendragon," I protested, "your degree does not warrant me in it."

"By my hand!" said he, "you must not talk of

degree to me, you varlet. Do you not know that in England any person who has a king's blood under his doublet is called a lord by courtesy."

To this I demurred not a little, but Sir Richard Pendragon would brook no denial.

"A king's blood," said he, "takes a courtesy title wherever it goes. If I lie in Dresden I am called your excellency; at Rome, monseigneur; the same at Paris; in Persia, in Russia, in Turkey, throughout the length and breadth of Europe and Asia I am allowed my merit."

In the end I was fain to submit to these considerations, although I confess it irked me sorely to apply such a title to one who, according to his style, was no more than a knight. But I had to content myself with Sir Richard Pendragon's own reflection that a king's blood is subject to no precedent, and by its own virtue confers its own nobility. And certainly had he been a prince of the blood royal of his country, his conduct at this inn could not have been more remarkable. I had to eat at another table; he even went so far as to swear at me roundly in a foreign jargon; yet the thing that hurt me was, that he was careful to let those who heard him know that his servant was a scion of an old and honourable Spanish family.

"I think, good Don," he said in my private ear, "your condition would warrant me in looking upon you as what the French call an equerry. It would not come amiss if you served behind my chair at meals, laying a white cloth across your arm and setting the various dishes before me with a solemn

demeanour. And I would have you say 'yes, my lord,' and 'no, your lordship,' in a rather louder voice, in order that there should be no mistake about it. It will not sound amiss in the ears of innkeepers in a large way of trade, and that sort of people."

After our meal, which in these circumstances had not given me so much satisfaction as I had hoped, we made for the castle of the duke, five good leagues off. Our way was set across the noble bridge of Alcantara, whose arches span the Tagus. With a proud heart I commended this fair thing to the notice of my companion; and though he stroked his beard and confessed it was not amiss for Spain, he declared it could not compare with what was modestly called the Fleet Ditch that was in London.

As we crossed this bridge we could see clearly, a long distance away, the white castle of the duke, sitting grand and solitary upon one of those brown and rugged hills that make a girdle round the city. And the sight of this brave pile, standing proud upon its promontory, clad in the young beams of the sun, set all my heart in joy; for the contour of the great house that was before me was in tune with my aspirations and lent a proper semblance to my dreams.

CHAPTER X.

OF OUR COMING TO THE DUKE OF MONTESINA AND HIS HOUSE UPON THE HILL.

"Oh, look, Sir Englishman!" I cried, in the immodesty of my soul. "Do you not see those tall white walls

that crown yonder precipice? Look at the beams of the morning on each spire and turret. Do they not smile and beckon? Look at those soldiers with flashing corslets marching upon the outer scarp. Do you not see their halberds glistening and the golden sheen upon their caps? Do they not feed your heart, Sir Englishman, these symbols of renown and victory?"

Indeed, all the majesty of power and the high-hearted genius of war and lofty enterprise passed before my eyes that morning in the spring. Hitherto my life was laid among the mountains in the north, where in one-and-twenty years the bravest things presented to it were monasteries, in themselves grand and severe, yet calling with no trumpet to the blood; and now and then some stained and ragged soldier, maimed and overborne, returning to his native parts. But now that my soul was filled with images of martial businesses, which never fail to delight an ardent nature, the sight thrilled in my veins like music; and as I stood upon the bridge of Alcantara, with my heart attuned to a strange yearning of desire, I rejoiced so greatly in the life that God had given me, that looking far unto those hills on which was set this castle, I thought I saw His face shining between the distant mountains and the yet more distant heavens.

"Sir Richard Pendragon," I said, in the ecstasy of contemplation of the future and its store, "limn that surprising lady that is daughter to the duke; for I am here to woo her with courage, constancy, and high thoughts. You understand me?"

"I understand you for a beggar," said the Englishman, with a laugh and a short grunt.

"My purse is bankrupt," said I, "but there is blood in my heart and a sword by my leg; and, good Sir Richard Pendragon, if you could look behind my purposes, you would say I had no poverty whatever."

"Well, now," said he, "if you had so much as three pesetas in the world, which you've not, I would wager that amount against you that if you could obtain the ear of the duke—and even to do that you will have to tread as warily as a young dog fox stealing down a hedgerow upon a morning in October—he will either pull your ears or cut your throat when you mention his daughter. Why, if he hath a miniard goodly wench with a rounded chin and a neat ankle, hath she no suitors, varlet? Are there no princes and noblemen and foreigners of consideration, with the blood of kings under their doublets, to woo this piece of the rib of Adam? Would they not come to this castle with the blowing of horns and the waving of banners, with companies of soldiers wearing their livery? Think of the valour of their performances, good varlet; the treasure in their chests; the breadth of their dominions. And then Master Don What-does-he-call-himself—a country youth with his shoes clouted by the village cobbler, a very beggar without a dole in his wallet, a raw Hodge or bumpkin, as we say in our direct English parlance, with a pair of hose too small in the shank and a coat laced with steel already past its meridian—this mad fellow comes forward and speaks

to the duke of his daughter! If I do not die of a fluxion, may I forget the savour of burnt sack!"

Now though I was so derided by the Englishman, he had so poor an opinion of all persons, with one notable exception, that I did not pay him that heed which perhaps I ought to have done. Yet I will confess that the higher we ascended the steep road that wound in and out to the gate of the castle, the more was my mind engaged by the notion that his words had made to take shape in it; for he knew the world famously, and there might be sooth in what he said, since, after all, I had only my pedigree, good as it was, and a stout heart to recommend me to the duke's service.

As we rode up into the shadow of those walls, that were now sheer and massive over our heads, Sir Richard Pendragon bent towards me, and said,—

"Miguel, be advised by an elderly soldado. Get you back to Toledo city, sell your horse, which is as old as the moon, buy yourself an orange basket, take your stance at the shadiest corner of the Plaza del Toros, and be content with a modest annuity. You can then pay the true friend that addresses you the hundred crowns that are his due for launching you out of your native element into this broad and magnificent world. The sun is a good thing, so are the stars, so are the rivers and mountains, so is yonder palace of the Moriscoes, so is this castle that lies before us; and when you beget children you will be able to say that you have looked on all these things in your youth. But I pray you, my son, not to dwell upon them here. Return to some humbler walk,

good Don; for if you adventure through these white gates flanked with grinning dragons made out of pumice stone, that sanguine and youthful spirit may get such an overthrow as will cripple it for years. At present, my young companion, you are of no account in the world. Now go your ways, like a good boy, and sell the wind-galled, curb-hocked, and bespavined old bone-bag that bears you."

"Good Sir Richard Pendragon," I said stoutly, "I have no fear of my reception before the duke. My sword is not much, but he shall have it for his use."

"Much!" said the Englishman; "much is a large word for nothing. Get an orange basket, my son; and I pray you not to come into the presence of his grace before you have grown a beard. He is a whimsical old fellow, and yet so haughty that he might cut off your ears if you caused him to laugh excessively."

"Pray have no qualms, Sir Richard. I will speedily obtain an audience of this grandee, and will look to it that he does not laugh at me too much."

Being extremely upon my mettle, I rapped smartly with the hilt of my sword upon the massive gate.

When the Englishman saw that no heed was paid to my repeated blows, he laughed in a short, dry fashion, which gave me a feeling of discomfort.

"By your leave, you man of wisdom," said he, "and advancing my poor opinion with that reserve that is its merit, I believe I spy a chain and padlock to this gate."

I was fain to confess myself puzzled when my eye fell on these accompaniments.

"I am thinking, my son," said Sir Richard, "although, to be sure, it is no more than a whim or a notion of mine, that you might be called to wait six days for an answer to your summons, for by its situation I should judge it to be a gate that is opened once a week, of a Wednesday, for the kitchen-maids to sally out and wash their linen down below in the Tagus. And I would respectfully urge, although this again is no more than a whim or a notion, that the grand entrance is along this path half a furlong to the left; at least, if it be not so, it hath changed its place since I was here last June."

It put me out of humour to reflect that I had not used my observation more shrewdly, for as soon as I received this information, which the Englishman conveyed to me in a mocking manner, I was able to perceive that behind the gate the patio was empty, instead of thronging soldiers and activity. Therefore we turned our horses into the path he had proposed, and stayed them presently before a gate far handsomer. And no sooner had I set my sword to this than it fell back before my hand and a very grave personage was standing with his hat off before my bridle-rein and inquiring my good pleasure.

That he was a person of consideration was clear enough. His mien was extraordinarily dignified, and to all that I said he listened politely; but when I asked for an audience of the duke he referred me to one of a surpassing stoutness, who came waddling up to us as we discoursed together. This gentleman,

although extremely heavy and slow of speech, proved just as civil, and gave me to understand that he was no less a person than Don Luiz, the duke's gentleman-usher. But when I spoke of an audience he bowed very low, and yet looked at me in a kind of sorrow, for he said,—

"Sir, you crave the impossible. The levee was yesterday, and a week must pass before you can be admitted to the next."

"Sir," I said, "I have travelled from the Asturias upon no other errand,"

Don Luiz shook his head, and deplored the fact that this could not help the matter. And all this time the Englishman was laughing in such a manner that I feared he must pitch straight off his horse.

"I would have you to believe, Don Luiz," said I, with an urgency that was increased by the behaviour of the Englishman, "that I am one Miguel Jesus Maria de Sarda y Boegas, a name antecedent, if you please, to the Moorish invasion, and as favourably looked on as any in the northern provinces."

Still, in spite of the earnestness with which I mentioned this, the portly and consequential Don Luiz stood as mute as a stone, not so much as twitching his lips or abating his glance in any particular. Indeed it would seem, from the manner in which he enfolded me in his sleepy looks, that the style of my clothes and their condition were a more imminent matter than my business and descent.

"Next week, sir," was all he deigned to reply, and pointed to the gate for his final answer. Feeling

myself to be powerless against this refusal, which was yet very arbitrary, resentment began to stir within me.

"Don Luiz," I said firmly, "I cannot leave the precincts of this castle until I have had audience of its master. I have journeyed expressly from the Asturias to speak with him, and I can assure you it is not my custom to permit anything to interpose between my mind and its declared intention."

Yet, notwithstanding the importunity of my tone, it left Don Luiz quite impassive. Indeed ere long he undertook to show me another side to this affair. He summoned two or three of the soldiers that were marching up and down the patio, and in short terms ordered them to conduct me to the gate. And I think I should have been taken there in this ignominious fashion had not at this moment Sir Richard Pendragon, who all this while had been consumed with mirth, addressed the portly gentleman-usher.

"Don Luiz," said he, "I would have you pay no heed to this poor mad varlet that is my squire. You see, Don Luiz, this immoderate, raving squire of mine once travelled in my suite to the Asturias, and in those altitudes he beheld a maid of pedigree to whom his wayward fancy turned. And that matter deranged any little wit he did enjoy; for 'a kissed her in those altitudes underneath the moon, and since that evening 'a has been a babbler. His conversation is now composed of pedigrees, maidens, Asturias, and moonshine of a highly grievous nature.

It is pitiful, Don Luiz, yet to my mind there is a kind of poetry in it also."

Now Sir Richard Pendragon feigned this monstrous tale with such a simplicity of look, and recited it with such a proper voice, that Don Luiz was moved to credulity, and said, "How whimsical! Yet indeed, sir, it does not surprise me, for I could discern from his address that he had a maggot in his brain."

"Faith, yes," said Sir Richard, with a solemnity at which I marvelled, "and it twists his poor mind into such odd and strange devices as you would never believe. Why, if he sits at home at the castle, he either plays mumchance all day by the buttery door or devises some ridiculous melody upon the virginal that makes all the cook-maids shed tears, or, stranger than that, Don Luiz, he will sit for hours playing snapdragon with the wishbone of a fowl. And when I say to him, 'Wherefore, Miguel, should this quaintness be your chief employ?' says he, with his eyes full of tears, 'Why, excellency, if I used my fingers it would be sure to burn my hand.' Did you ever hear such an honest Christian Spaniard speak the like, Don Luiz?"

"By my faith, sir, I did not," said Don Luiz, betraying some tokens of impatiency. "Might I trouble you, sir, to the extent of asking your business?"

"To see your master, the duke, in audience."

"Then, sir, my answer must, with all respect, hold the same with you as with your twisted and unhappy squire."

"I am afeared, Don Luiz," said my strange companion with a look of insolence that became him remarkably well, "your wits are so accompanied by sack and butter that you do not take me in this affair. I will see your master at once."

"On Tuesday next, sir," said the gentleman-usher. "Before then an audience is out of the question."

"I say I will see your master immediately," said the Englishman. "Do you go straightway and inform him that a messenger is at the gate who hath ridden express from the King and is demanding audience."

"The King!" exclaimed Don Luiz, while I held my breath at such a piece of audacity.

"The King," said Sir Richard Pendragon sternly. "The King, my master, who holds the Duke of Montesina and all his minions in the hollow of his hand. Do you go straightway and tell him that, Don Luiz."

Upon this assertion the chamberlain delivered a humble apology, called to the grooms to take our horses, conducted us to an antechamber with the greatest promptitude, and went forth himself to bear the matter to his master. As soon as I was alone with my companion in the fair apartment we had entered I began to tremble violently, and said to the outrageous foreigner,—

"This is indeed a fine pickle, Sir Englishman! We shall certainly be thrown into a dungeon, or perchance shall lose our heads. No prince of Spain will forgive you unless you make good your words."

"You are a mad varlet," said the Englishman; "you are as mad as nine men's morris."

"The madness is with you, sir, in this grievous and terrible matter."

"Ah, my young companion," said the Englishman, "what a vain fellow thou art to go in quest of the Princess Fortune without a knowledge of the world. The time is ripe for me to give you a watch-word, my son; your excellent father appears not to have mentioned it. Learn to speak in a loud voice. Fail in no enterprise from a disregard of that motto, and in lieu of a vulgar death upon the gallows, which is the natural destination of every snuffler that goes about paltry chewing his words, you will die an eminently Christian death upon the field of battle, or in your bed with your favourite bawd soothing your pillows with hot and bitter tears."

Before I could derive any store of fortitude from this advice wherewith to meet the grave ordeal that was now before us both, Don Luiz returned with the information that the duke, his master, was graciously pleased to receive us in audience.

Now, whether it was the sting of the rebuffs that I had already suffered during that ill-fated day, or the notion that I was become as a branded madman by the tongue of calumny, or whether it was the odd manner of our entrance, I cannot say, but what I know is this—I felt the sweat creep upon my brow as I made my way into the presence of this august grandee. I followed close upon the heels of Don Luiz and my most singular companion.

We passed through several spacious and gorgeous apartments which were clad in great richness. Never had I seen so much magnificence before. The mere presence of so much splendour seemed to daunt me, for notwithstanding my birth and my father's honour, in my country suit all dulled with dust, and my old boots, I felt myself to be but little better than a rustical fellow in surroundings of this kind.

Yet the Englishman, although his dress in its inconsistency was scarcely above my own, and though his pretext was so abominably false that it had only to be exposed to place his life in jeopardy, was just as much upon his ease in this dangerous place as if he had been abroad in the plain. Without removing his bonnet or showing the least concern for the dignity of the palace, he uttered a ribald joke in the ear of Don Luiz and spoke to him of the weather.

When at last we were ushered into the presence of the duke I tried to muster my courage, for I felt that the great moment of my life was come. Striving to make an honourable appearance I bore my head high and held myself in the most martial manner I could assume, and through the haze that oppressed my eyes I strove to stand worthy of my quest and the noble lady I was come to serve. You will understand, gentle reader, that all depended on the fair impression I must contrive to make upon the great nobleman who was about to receive me. Yet I was fain to reflect that I must have done better justice to my birth and breeding, which were all the

credentials I had to offer, had I not been so unluckily accompanied. I am sure no one could have been more deeply sensible of the disadvantage of such a companionship. The flippant behaviour of Sir Richard Pendragon must have sorely abated the grace of my bearing, since such a mode of entry as he adopted before a great personage must have been wholly to the detriment of any who followed in his train. Indeed this extraordinary person was humming a catch as he swaggered like a common ruffler, with his bonnet on, into the presence of his grace, the Duke of Montesina.

The private chamber in which the duke sat was smaller than the others through which we had passed. It was draped heavily with gorgeous tapestries, and instead of rushes upon the floor there was a rich Arabian carpet. The first thing I perceived was a noble painting of the Holy Virgin. The duke was sitting in a gilded chair placed on a daïs near a window through which streamed the beams of the bright sun. He was engaged upon a refection of light wine and oat cake, and was alone save for a dwarf who mowed at us behind the chair of his master.

The duke was an old man with a beard of silver, frail and little in his person, and of an ascetic, yet, as I make bold to think, a somewhat peevish countenance. He rose upon our entry and bowed in so sublime a manner as at once to make it clear that here was the pink and mirror of a Spanish gentleman; one whose mind was grave and lofty, and whose person was garnished with fine graces. A piece of

old punctilio he was, according to my companion, yet when he left his chair and took a few steps towards us, to confer upon us an additional grace of welcome, his form seemed to have been wedded to silk and silver all its days, such was the ease with which it bore them; he seemed to move to music; while when he brought himself to business, it appeared to my disordered mind, dazzled as it was with so much glamour, that his lightest word became a proclamation and his frown an executioner. Sir Richard Pendragon, however, was far from having this awe of him. It filled me with dismay to see this person of foreign nationality passage with the duke for all the world as if he were of an equal condition.

"I trust I find the grace of your lordship in pretty good health," said the English giant; and it relieved me much to observe that he had the good manners to pull off his bonnet, and to bow not ungracefully when he addressed the duke in this fashion.

"I find myself in good health, I thank you, sir," said the duke coldly and simply. "You bear a communication from my nephew Castile, I understand?"

"I am glad your excellency understands that," said the Englishman, "for burn my five wits if I do!"

"Will you deign to explain this matter?" said the duke, and it turned me faint in my spirit to see a sudden light of anger flame across his eyes.

"If I mentioned your nephew Castile, may I

never drink sack out of a bombard again," said the Englishman.

"Bimbos," said the duke, turning to the dwarf, who was grinning like a jackanapes behind him, "do you go to Don Luiz and bring him here instantly."

It was clear that the duke was a man of choler by the irascibility of his words.

Don Luiz came immediately. There was trepidation in his mien.

"This person," said the duke, "informs us that he bears no communication from our nephew the Castilian."

"Under your favour, excellency," said the Englishman, "your mind although virtuously given and an ornament to your age and country, appears to have led you into some sort of confusion. English Richard, honest man, never spoke of Castile your nephew; he would scorn to speak of such a scurvy rogue, but rather did he mention your lordship's lord and master."

"My lord," said the fat Don Luiz, speaking with a most ponderous impressiveness, "my words shall be these. This gentleman informed me at the gate that he was the bearer of a message from the King, and on that ground demanded audience in quite a peremptory manner."

"So I did, brother, so I did," said the Englishman. "You cursed Spaniards are so dull that I am obliged to speak peremptory if I speak at all."

"Further, my lord," said Don Luiz, passing over

this scandalous interruption with immense disdain, "he declared himself to be the emissary of that great King who at this moment held, as it were, your lordship's grace in the hollow of his hand. Now, it was perfectly clear to me, your lordship, that there is only one king whose might is of this nature, which is him of Castile, your lordship's nephew. Thus, under your grace's favour, was I justified, I think."

"Ods my life!" said the duke, addressing my companion with the greatest irascibility, "if I find you have perverted your speech in this particular, or that you think to make a toy of such as I, sirrah, I will undertake to show you how far you are astray by having you broke upon the wheel."

When the angry duke spoke these last terrible words he exalted his voice into such an accent as rendered them truly affrighting to my ears. Straight I fell into a violent trembling on the Englishman's account; but he, steadfast man, did not abate a whit of his easy smiling. As he looked at the threatful duke his red eyes seemed to be full of a furtive and whimsical humour.

"No, by my soul," he said, "this is not politeness, at least as we of England understand that quality. Wheel? No matter where I travel in this unholy land of Spain, the parish that I come to is a scurvy one. Wheel? Duke or donkey driver, it is nothing to the matter, all are tainted with incivility. Wheel? Why, duke, my message is 'Be thou of good courage,' and He who sends it thee is that great King of Heaven who holds thee

in the hollow of His hand. Do you pause and think upon it, duke."

The duke obeyed him in this particular, for certes he paused and thought upon it much. And while this he did with a deal of gravity, the wheel rose up before my eyes and I could feel my bones being broken on it. For was ever such audacity since the beginning of the world!

CHAPTER XI.

OF A GRIEVOUS HAP.

THOUGH an old little man, wizened like a pea, and peevish in his manners, the duke was wonderfully impressive in his look. He stood up as straight as a tree, and kept peering at the Englishman with a grave eye, as if in meditation upon the drastic form of his punishment. Yet all of a sudden, and quite strangely and oddly, a sharp kind of crackling and barking came out of him; as near, I suppose, to a chuckle of mirth as one of such dignity could allow himself to emit.

"Ha! ha!" he cackled. "Ods myself! good fellow, this is a roguish jest of yours. But daring, don't you think, but daring? Yet a roguish jest."

So great was my concern for the exceeding delicacy of the issue that at first the words of the duke seemed of no account. My mind could not address itself to their meaning, but could only marvel that so great a man should repeat his phrases.

"And why, sirrah," asked the duke, "am I to be so especially of good courage at this season? My situation hath taken no kinder turn of late, so far as I can tell. Why must I be so cheerful then?"

"Because," was the reply of this audacious foreigner, "Richard Pendragon, knight of England, hero of an hundred fields, is here to make you an offer of his service. This two and a quarter yards by a yard and a half of brawn and valiancy hath left a monstrous quantity of the kingly blood that flows beneath his doublet on the battle meads of Europe. How many a pretty daisy hath fed its damask on the azure blood of a Pendragon! This gentle knight in question is also pretty well at fighting, duke, for you shall search the three continents to match this modest swaggerer at sword, broadsword, sword and buckler, sword and target, and above all, and more particularly in a private brawl, with that peerless weapon, the Italian rapier of Ferrara steel. And mark you also, duke, there is a genius in his handling of the sweet Toledo blade. As for the mind of this incomparable character, it shines as brightly as his steel, for you will notice that his forehead rises perpendicular in the true Pendragon manner, and therefore he is a child of stratagem."

You will suppose that I watched the passaging of the duke and this singular Sir Richard Pendragon with the gravest solicitude. There never was such a whimsically assorted pair: the small old man, the duke, one of the first gentlemen of his age, so well appointed in his dress, so fortunate in his person,

so sedate in his mien for all his querulousness, which in one of less consideration might have incurred another name; the Englishman monstrous in his growth, gross and irregular in form and countenance, his clothes patched and pieced into the quaintest contexture. But beyond all this they were so opposed in address; the duke ever majestical in spite of his peevishness, with a highly musical civility in his speech, every word of which was simple, clear, and urbane, the ideal for a gentleman; while this Englishman's, when it was not braggadocio and ruffling, with many uncomely foreign accents in it, ran into conceits and picturesqueness of every sort, and betraying a reverence for no man save the one who had all his worship.

Still the world is an incongruous place, as Don Ygnacio hath it, and reconcilable to none of the laws that we know. Therefore this grandee fell in with the whims of the mad Englishman, and kept turning the tail of an eye upon him, which yet seemed to have too much dignity to laugh outright at a cause so trivial; whilst to me, a gentleman of his own race and nation, who knew the consideration that belonged to him, and was careful to render it, he was as cold and unresponsive as one of the walls of his castle.

Presently Sir Richard Pendragon so delighted the old gentleman with one or two wonderfully cunning tricks of fence and manual dexterity, such as spinning his sword in the air and catching the naked point in his palm, and flicking buttons off the jerkin of the dwarf, that the duke clapped his hands for pleasure

with the glee of a child, although he was one of the gravest rulers in Spain, and cried out heartily,—

"Brava, brava, sirrah! Now get thee to the buttery, and then do thou come back, and show us again."

At the mention of the honest word "buttery" Sir Richard Pendragon turned upon his heel without delay, and made his way there with a haste that to my mind ill became one of his degree, although I had begun to doubt whether in his native country the title he bore was so eminently honourable as it is in ours.

"A very whimsical fellow," said the duke to Don Luiz as the Englishman went forth. "He will serve to amuse us of a morning, and of an evening too. By my faith, Luiz, this is a good fellow."

"A good fellow, my lord, as your lordship has designed to remark," said Don Luiz ponderously; "and I mind me that he has the name of a brave and cunning man. He gave your grace's nephew of Castile a great deal of trouble a year ago with his bold and hardy band of adventurers. According to report he has the name of a skilful captain, who is as ingenious in his mind as he is warlike in his attributes."

"That is well, Luiz," said the duke. "I am pleased at this. See to it that he hath thirty crowns a month, and do you give him the command of our horse."

Hearing this magnanimous and simple-hearted nobleman filled with the praises of one who, what-

ever his merit, was yet unacquainted with the true inner grace of the heart, my courage mounted in my veins, and hope whispered many things it pleased me mightily to hear. Yet, when I ventured to bespeak the duke, as I conceived in a mode highly proper, he returned immediately to that formal gravity of mien which he had worn when first I had come into his presence.

"Your lordship's grace," I began, "my name is Miguel Jesus Maria de Sarda y Boegas, and of the natural blood of him who fought with Alban II. against the Moor at Loja, at Lucena, and an hundred fields. I am, I would have your lordship to believe, of the first families of our Asturias; and hearing of the uneasy situation of your lordship in the south, I have adventured from my native mountains to proffer to your lordship my sword and service."

"Don Miguel Jesus Maria de Sarda y Boegas," said the duke, "I thank you for them."

"And, my lord, I would crave the gentle permission of your lordship to serve your daughter, if daughter hath your grace, and rumour hath not lied; for it is written among the precepts of my late father, Don Ygnacio, that I should serve her, if served she is to be, as faithfully as I am fain to serve her sire."

Was ever man so cursed with the unlucky tongue within him! No sooner had I dropped a word about his daughter than a lively purple ran into his face, and that countenance which had been so gracious grew suddenly so arrogant that I was filled with qualms. . . . . .

"Are you a prince of the sangre azul of Spain, Don Miguel Jesus Maria de Sarda y Boegas," said he, "that you seek to serve my daughter?"

"Not a prince, my lord," said I with proud humility, "but there is no choicer blood than ours in the Asturias."

"Then, sir, since you are not a prince, and you have made mention of my daughter, our interview is at an end."

"My lord, when I spoke of your lordship's daughter, I spoke in humility. Wherein have I had the unhappiness to offend the grace of your lordship?"

"The offence is nature's, sir, in not making you a prince," said the duke with a surprising choler. "I give you good day, Don Miguel."

He bowed low, and the portly Don Luiz opened the door.

I found myself in the antechamber without the least recollection of my coming there. Indeed, in such a degree was I embarrassed by the duke's anger that at first I did not know where I was or what I did. I stood lost in wonder. I wondered at the duke, I wondered at myself, but most of all I wondered at the world and its courses. I could not believe that a man should be so affronted at so seemly a mention of his daughter. I could have shed tears at this rebuff, and the deplorable case in which I stood, but my father's wisdom stole through my veins like a balm, and I remembered that adversity is one of God's stratagems to test the temper of the least of His servants.

As I took my way to the gate of the castle with

my feathers drooping, I encountered the more fortunate Sir Richard Pendragon smiling at his private thoughts and sucking sack off his beard.

"Hullo, good springald youth," he said, "you have met your fall I perceive. But, my young son of the Spains, I pray you to remember that a man with a provincial manner should not speak to a duke of his daughter. Sell oranges and make your fortune, for I fear that make it otherwise you never will. But, my young companion, I pray you do not take it too much amiss. There are many blows on the sconce to receive as you go through the world. And let me tell you, Miguel, I am prone to a tenderness in cases of grave, persistent, and determined folly. And so, Miguel, I have a tenderness to thee. Fare thee well, my young companion, and here is a purse containing eight crowns and an old heirloom, for I am determined upon it that thou shalt not suffer for a start in life."

These words were spoken not unkindly, and I was grateful to this barbarian for speaking them; but I think I might have been grateful had a dog so much as looked at me just then. And to my great astonishment here was my old dogskin and my father's patrimony and my mother's ring come back to me. But rejoiced as I was to get them again, I deemed it wise that no questions should pass upon the subject.

I told a servant to fetch Babieca, and when he had brought him to me he looked upon me askance because I did not vail him for the deed. I rode

forth of the gates with the sun shining in the blue with fierce magnificence, and pointed my unprosperous course towards the city of Toledo. As these latitudes were much farther to the south than any I had been in before, I found the sun was even more against me than on the ill-starred day I had started from my home. Thus in great dejection of mind and body I returned across the bridge of Alcantara, and in my heart's extremity cast a final glance at that noble and deluding house, seated imperial on its promontory, beyond the yellow stretches of the fields. It could hardly have been more fair to the eye than formerly, yet now, because my fortunes looked another way and I had met rejection, and this beautiful castle had been placed beyond my ken, it seemed to take, even as I gazed, a thousand fresh glamours from the sun, and grew so gorgeous and desirable as to mock me with each of its gay turrets and pinnacles.

Overcome by the bitterness of my reflections, I checked my horse as he picked his way delicately down the steep winding path, and turning about, stood up in the saddle to confront that haughty palace that offered me disdain. Raising my right arm, I cried, " Proud castle, mock me if you please, but the hour shall dawn when you shall honour Miguel Jesus Maria de Sarda y Boegas ! "

Doubtless these words were vain, yet there was that in my heart that seemed to give them warrant ; and whether they made good the right to be uttered will be made clear in the process of this history.

Upon coming into the town and reaching the Chapel of the Consummation, I found a shady prospect beneath its walls. Tying Babieca to a railing, I sat down to meditate upon the course of my affairs. It was clear that I had much to learn before I might move with security into the world. Sir Richard Pendragon, barbarous foreigner as he was, had taught me already that we must learn to decipher the human character and its manifold complexities ere the smiles of Fortune can requite those who crave them. But at least, thought I, as I sought consolation of my father's never-failing wisdom, this is a vicarious world, in which our material state is nothing, and of all things only an honest mind is virtuous.

To such a degree did I console my heart with this reflection that for a time I was put in a mood of philosophy. I was even led to consider that my poverty was a worthy thing, a symbol of purity, for was it not an evidence that my devices had not been of an unworthy nature? But, alas! all too soon my ingenuity overthrew my fortitude: for I was reminded by these thoughts that eight pieces of silver was my patrimony; that I was a stranger in a foreign country; that I was unskilled in war and knowledge; that I was hungry; that my cloak was wearing thin; that to sleep upon the bare ground was to breed an ache in the bones; in fine, that I was penniless and friendless, and was at the end of my five wits to avert the soul and the body being torn asunder. Looking up, however, I beheld the placid, kindly face of the

amiable Babica; and then was I taken with a new resource.

CHAPTER XII.

OF ADVERSITY. OF A CHANCE ACQUAINTANCE. OF A FAIR STRANGER.

To rob oneself of a friend is to commit a felony against the heart; and where is the man who can afford to do that? The pangs of the heart, believe me, are less to be supported than those of the stomach; for I groaned under the stings of both in this the season of my adversity. A pennyworth of bread will avail against the one, but in that other case a man must outlive his recollection, and forget a thousand deeds of kindness to heal the breach left gaping in his gratitude.

This is why I looked so long at the gentle Babieca without making a decision. To part with him was necessary to the lives of us both, as I could furnish food and lodging for neither; but much as I looked into his quiet eyes, or gazed upon his shapeliness, or stroked his friendly nose, I was as barren of expedients as I was of fortune or good prospects.

It was indeed a wrench to sell this honest creature, and I let the best part of the day go by ere I could persuade myself to suffer it. Then, gathering up Babieca's bridle, I led him through the town to make money of his qualities. Coming to the market square, I asked a water-seller to direct me to a dealer in horses. This he did—to one Cacheco,

whom he recommended stoutly as a man of purity in trade.

I found the Señor Cacheco in a corner of the market-place, seated such an enviable distance in the shade that I saw the sagacity of his character at once; for I tell you, reader, that any person who can make good his claims to a spot so sheltered against the sweating market hordes is not by any means to be looked on lightly. His stock consisted of three or four ponies of an inferior sort and an ass that had the mange.

This worthy was greatly at his ease beneath a pony's belly, a situation that gave him some protection from the flies. His face was one that hardly invited confidence in his rectitude, being nothing like so pretty as the reference I had received; besides he squinted villainously, and would not look at you straightly out of the middle of the eyes, but leered out of the corners. He got up slowly, yawned, stretched his limbs, approached me with a sliding gait, and asked if I wished to make a purchase.

"On the contrary, I have this horse to sell."

"Oh, it's a horse," said he. "I would never have guessed that, I am sure, now. He makes such a noise when he draws his breath that I supposed he was related to the windmill family."

I rated Cacheco for this impudence, and told him that he lied.

"He is as sound as a trumpet, you rogue, and I'll defy the Devil to prove that Babieca is otherwise."

"Take him to the Devil, then," said the fellow

coarsely, "and see if he will buy him. Besides, he hath a curby hock."

I admitted that to be the case, but spoke about his pedigree.

"Pedigree!" cried the rude fellow. "My business is in horses, not in pedigrees. Am I a man of fortune, then, that I should buy a pedigree? I will give you five crowns."

"Five crowns, you rogue! Why, he has been in my family for years!"

"An heirloom, I see," said the horse-dealer. "Old Mutacho, the dealer in the antique, is over there across the market. You will find him fast asleep like a tortoise, with his head resting against the thigh piece of the Cid."

In the height of this altercation I heard a titter of laughter. Feeling hot and discomposed already with an argument in which I showed to no advantage, I looked about to see from whom it might proceed. It surprised me to discover that I was providing a spectacle for one who appeared to make no secret of the fact that he was enjoying it.

"You are amused, sir?" I said, addressing this person sternly, for I felt myself upon the verge of a passion.

"Very," said he, at his leisure and in a soft voice.

"May I ask, sir, in what particular I have the happiness to amuse you?"

"My dear friend," said this person, more at his leisure than ever, "it would take me a long while to render it clear to you, and the heat is excessive; but if you will do me the honour to

repair to my lodgings, I may be able to explain the whole matter over a bottle of wine. And may I pray you to bring the admirable Babieca, for next to the friendship of his master I am sure I shall value his before anything else in the world."

Now, in the circumstances, such an address was extremely singular, but the courtesy with which it was accompanied was so fine, and the air and bearing of the person who employed it were so admirable, that I knew at once that I had been accosted by a man of birth. Taking off his hat, which was adorned with a long white plume, he bowed to the ground; and while I hoped that my demeanour was in no wise behind his own, I could not refrain from feeling how much honour his true Spanish politeness did him.

"You are of Castile, sir, I am sure?"

"Ah no," said he, in a soft, lisping accent, "I can make no claim to be one of your adorable nation."

"Then, sir, may I ask to whom I have the honour of paying my addresses?"

"Truly. I am Monsieur le Comte de Nullepart, Marquis de Outre le Mer, Sieur des Champs Elysees. And you, sir—and you?"

"I am one Miguel Jesus Maria de Sarda y Boegas, a name which has yet to declare itself, Sir Count, in this part of our peninsula, but which has been held in high esteem in our northern province of Asturias for many hundreds of years."

"We are choicely met, Don Miguel, and if you will do me the signal honour of accompanying

me to supper, I shall be the happiest man in the world."

Upon an invitation of such courtesy you will readily suppose, good reader, it was not for me to refuse. For his musical speech, the delicate breeding of his air, the distinction of his dress, sombre and chaste, yet handsome and well-fitting, all proclaimed his quality. His face looked melancholy, yet now and again a tender and sweet smile would suffuse it, and change it altogether as if by the magic of poetry.

The companion I had found in this strange and providential fashion would not hear of my parting with Babieca, although within five minutes of our acquaintance I must have revealed to him my bitter poverty, for he was such a one to whom the proudest bosom unfolds its secrets. There was some kind of enchantment in his face, and I took no shame from telling him that I was in the world alone, and that fortune had rebuffed me.

"Ah, Fortune, Fortune!" said he. "She is the Proud Princess whom we woo all our days, and who kills us with melancholy because she will have none of us. Did you ever meet one, my dear Don Miguel, upon whom she had smiled?"

"No, Sir Count," said I, "I have yet to have that happiness. She did not smile upon my father, and she hath not smiled upon me."

"The proud jade is a chimera," said the Count of Nullepart. "We seek her all our days, and when at last we have come up with her, and we press her to our bosom—lo! she is not, and we find ourselves

embracing the air. But come, my dear Don Miguel, we will eat in our inn, and leave philosophy until after supper."

I know not, reader, what providence it was that brought the Count of Nullepart and myself together, but as I led Babieca to this inn at his behest, he linked his arm through mine, and he became my brother. The tender melancholy of his smile, the music of his speech, lulled my mind not only with the superiority of his condition, but also with the nobility of his intelligence. Strangely his course was pointed to that fonda at which I had eaten my breakfast in the doubtful company of Sir Richard Pendragon early that day. Perhaps, however, this was not so remarkable, because the hostelry of "The Three Feathers" was the largest and fairest inn in the whole of the city.

It was with very different feelings that I sat at table in the company of this true gentleman, to those with which I had waited on the good pleasure of one whose gentility depended on his name. The fare of which we partook had been prepared with delicacy; the innkeeper served us in person with a deference which had its root in a desire to please my companion; the wine was of the first quality and was chosen well; and the discourse that flowed from the lips of the Count of Nullepart was the most charming of all—that of one who knows the world and is minded to forget it.

"There are no adventures outside of the soul," he said, toying with his cup of wine with white, slender, and tapering hands. "What are these

poor five wits of ours in comparison with the infinite senses of the inner nature? We lock out teeth, yet taste nothing; we open our eyes, yet see nothing; we incline our ears, yet hear nothing; we excite our nostrils, yet smell no perfume; we prick ourselves with a dagger, yet there is nothing we can feel. It is the same with this Princess Fortune that we talk about: we seek her forever, yet find her not. There is no princess, my friend, there is no princess."

"I think, Sir Count," said I, "the point is debatable. My father went in quest of her, yet did not find her, and I have not found her myself; but one of these days I will—I am determined upon it."

"And when you have done so, dear Don Miguel, you will press her to your bosom, and she will melt in the air."

After our supper (which, according to my taste, was of the most perfect kind), the Count of Nullepart drew a flageolet from his pocket and played a melody. It was very graceful, low-voiced, and melancholy, and being his own composition, was performed with the true delicacy of the amateur.

The hours chased one another away, for the Count of Nullepart had a full mind and spoke of many things. When there came a lull in our converse he would take up the flageolet again and improvise other melodies. Or he would call for the dice and throw a main for amusement's sake, for I had nothing better than Bibieca to wager, and with our northern caution I was unwilling to risk my all on a single cast.

I know not what hour of the evening it was,

but it must have been hard by to midnight, when our curiosity, which hitherto had been wholly engaged with one another, was diverted by the arrival of a guest. My companion was improvising an air on his instrument, when something of a commotion was heard at the door, and to our surprise a lady without attendance stepped into the inn and called for the servants in a loud clear voice.

The manner of her entrance caused the Count of Nullepart to lay his flageolet on the table, and to regard the fair intruder with a curiosity equal to that she had awakened in me. Fair she was indeed, since we could discern enough of her face to tell us so much. She was both young and frail, hardly more than a child, and she was habited in a coarse grey riding-dress that was covered with dust. But she had a most proud and fearless face; and when the landlord came forward in answer to her summons, in spite of her plain and almost rustic attire, she addressed him with so much insolence that she might have been a queen.

"Fellow," she said, "my horse hath a shoe cast. Put him to bed with some oats and good straw, and do you see to it that a smith is summoned at five of the morning. At six I go upon my journey."

The landlord bowed with proper humility, and declared that he would attend her commands.

"That is well," said she. "And do you bring me some food, for I have not broken my fast since an hour before noon."

When the landlord had gone about these behests,

she sank down on a settle in a condition of extreme weariness, threw down her whip petulantly, drew off her riding gauntlets, and flung them upon the floor.

In the meantime the Count of Nullepart had filled his cup out of the last of the numerous bottles of wine to which we had yielded ourselves, and he now carried it across the room with a wonderful air.

"Madam," he said, proffering this beaker with an indescribable grace, "if I may serve you, you will make me happy."

"I thank you, friend," she said, accepting the goblet, and sipping the wine without any hesitation at all.

"With your permission, madam," said the Count of Nullepart, "I will go forth and see to it that your horse is bedded worthily and hath a supper of oats."

"Do so, friend, and I will thank you for your service."

The little lady spoke with the sweet insolence of one who is accustomed to be served.

While the Count of Nullepart was away on this errand of courtesy, I was fain to cudgel my brains to find out who this fair stranger might be. That a young gentlewoman should ride into Toledo at midnight without attendance must have been an unheard-of matter. Yet again, her quality was not in any wise declared in her dusty and rumpled habit; but in its despite, her air, her bearing, the adorable beauty of her countenance, made her the

most enchanting figure upon whom it had ever been my hap to set my eyes. To have encountered two such persons in a single day as the Count of Nullepart and this lady was a clear proof that fortune was not so entirely unpropitious as she seemed.

When the Count of Nullepart returned, which he did very soon, he set himself to bestir the landlord in the matter of the lady's supper; and he besought her to accept a share of our table, which was the most favourably situated in the room.

The lady accepted every office that the count rendered her with the most charming and easy complaisance in the world, and when she came and took a seat with us, I observed with a thrill of delight that, fair as she looked from a distance, when she came near she appeared still more enchanting. Every line in the youthful face was moulded in the most sensitive manner. When a serving-maid had brought her supper, her eyes fell on the flageolet that lay on the table. She gave it to me, and said:

"Play a melody. It will amuse me while I eat."

I had to protest, shyly enough, I am afraid, that I had no skill in this instrument; whereon she lifted her eyes imperiously to the Count of Nullepart, and said,—

"You play a melody to amuse me while I eat."

Immediately the count broke into one of the choicest of his performances, and did it so rarely, with such elegance and mastery, as to make it divine; and yet I believe it amused him vastly, that the sweet little madam in whose behalf his handsome face was empurpled, and at whose com-

mand the veins swelled in his neck, paid not the least heed to his efforts, but munched away ravenously at the bread and meat that was laid before her, and sipped her wine with perfect unconcern.

Since that distant evening in the inn, whenever I have met a lady who is reputed to be peerless in beauty, before committing myself to an opinion upon the subject of her charms, my mind has reverted to this delectable creature And I have yet to observe one that could compare with this perfection of youthful womanhood. It did not matter into what courses her hunger led her, nought could lessen the austere fascination of a countenance which was tempered a little by the unconscious coquetry of its glance.

When she had eaten and had drunk her wine, she waved an imperious hand to the Count of Nullepart to cease his exertions; and although it was clear to us she had not heeded a note of his performance, she said calmly, "Friend, I thank you. You play very fairly well."

Had the Count of Nullepart not been one of the greatest breeding, I am sure he must have been consumed with laughter.

The little lady then turned to me, and said with an air that it is the business of all to obey, "Fetch me the innkeeper, if you please."

I obeyed the behest with alacrity; and when the landlord came into her presence, she ordered the best sleeping chamber in the inn to be set in readiness for her use, since it was her goodwill and pleasure to take a few hours' rest.

The innkeeper was obliged, with some agitation, to inform her that, so far from being able to place the best apartment at her disposal, he could not even place the worst, as one and all were in occupation.

"Then lay down a fresh truss of straw, and I will sleep with my horse," she said imperiously.

CHAPTER XIII.

OF OUR ENTRANCE INTO A NEW SERVICE.

AGAINST this order the Count of Nullepart laid an objection. He made the lady the offer of his own apartment; and this she accepted with a more gentle air than any she had previously used. While the landlord went to have this chamber put in readiness, she turned to my companion, saying with a slight hesitation that became her adorably,—

"Sir, you are my good friend."

"Your servant, madam, if your highness will only have it so," said the Count of Nullepart, with his amused air and that soft lisping speech which must have captivated the heart of any lady in the world.

"You call me out of my condition, sir," said she. "You speak me above my degree."

"Marry, do I?" said the Count of Nullepart, with a laugh and a shrug of the shoulders; "then will your highness furnish your true name and title, for I do but speak you as you seem, which I am sure cannot be more than you are."

"Yes, sir, you speak me out of my title, but I can see it is the fault of a courteous mind. But I cannot publish my degree to the world, sir, neither can I publish my name, so perhaps it were better that you addressed me as madam."

"Well, madam," said the Count of Nullepart, "I believe you to be in need of true servants, for you travel alone and in dangerous places."

"A woman, sir, is ever in need of true servants," said this adorable creature, that was hardly more than a child, looking upon the Count of Nullepart with large and unfearing eyes.

"You have either mixed in the world, madam," said he, "or you were born with knowledge, or this may be better sooth than you are aware; for, as you say, every woman is in need of true servants. I make you the formal offer, madam, of my sword, my goodwill, and my devotion."

Without more ado the Count of Nullepart rose from the table, and drawing his fine Spanish blade, fell on one knee before her. With the simple dignity of a princess, she held out her charming hand, and with humility the Count of Nullepart bore it to his lips.

"This is a good providence," said she, with a bright colour in her cheek, "for never was a woman in such sore need of good servants."

Immediately these words were spoken I also rose, and inspired by the count's example, drew my sword, and offered my service also. She accepted them with beautiful grace and composure.

"I fear, my friends," said she, "you will have

arduous labours. I am beset with every difficulty, and I have a great work to perform."

"Your servants will be the happier, madam," said I. "They will not be wanting in the hour of need."

Suddenly she rose with truly regal proudness, and looked at the Count of Nullepart and myself with earnest, questioning glances.

"Have you led armies, sir?" she asked of my companion.

"Ah, no, madam," said he with an arch smile; "except in my own soul."

"And you, sir, have you led armies?" she asked of me.

"No, madam," I said, "I have yet to do so; but there are those of my name who have fallen in battle, and when occasion calls, may I stand true to my inheritance!"

"And you know not the field," said she, "nor yet of the practice of war?"

"No, madam, but I have renounced my native mountains that I may gain that knowledge."

"It is well, sir, for in your new service you will see shrewd blows given."

"And shall hope to give them, madam."

"Yes, sir," said she, with the gravity of a minister of state, "you have a martial look; I doubt not the valiancy of your disposition."

The innkeeper came now to inform her that the sleeping-chamber had been set ready for her use.

"Before I give you good-night, my friends," she said in her proud, clear speech, "I would have

you, sir, play me another of your melodies upon the sweet instrument of which I cannot remember the name."

To this command the Count of Nullepart assented with an excellent grace, although on the previous occasion she had hardly deigned to listen to his playing. This time, however, she followed the music with flushed cheeks and parted lips, which showed she was yet something of a child at heart, although a woman in affairs.

"I thank you, friend," she said gravely; "you are indeed a sweet musicianer. It will be a part of your service to play to me every evening before I retire."

I know not whether it was the service we had proffered to her, or the wistful notes of the music that had melted her, but now she seemed to be transformed from the great lady of affairs to the romantical maid.

"You will attend me, my friends, through bloodshed and darkness," she said; "and whenever my voice is raised, and wherever it may be heard, you will obey its call?"

"We have sworn it, madam," said the Count of Nullepart.

"I see dark days; I fear an old house is poor and enfeebled, and is tottering to its ruin. But it is a good providence that sends such friends to its succour, and they shall be remembered in my prayers. At six of the morning we get upon our road. I now give you good-night, my friends; but in the meanwhile I would have you sleep

warily, for at any hour I may inquire if you are of a good vigilance."

I cannot say with what enchantment we watched this fair and imperious thing ascend the stairs of the inn to her chamber.

"That is a sweet quean," said the Count of Nullepart, calling for a new bottle of wine.

"And a brave, forsooth," said I. "What, I wonder, can be her degree?"

"To-morrow," said the Count of Nullepart, "will unmask this fair unknown."

"How singular it is," said I, "that she should ride unattended over the country and in these unseasonable hours."

"To-morrow we shall understand it all," said the Count of Nullepart. "Then shall we learn to what high destiny we are called."

"I am deceived," said I, "if there is not to be a great work toward. By my faith, how beautiful she is!"

"Aye," said the count, with one of his melancholy glances, "she is indeed the Proud Princess. Therefore I expect to-morrow will not dawn for us. We shall fall asleep over our wine, you and I, my dear Don Miguel, and awake to find that there is an end to our dreams. We shall find the bird flown."

"She will have to fly out at the window, then, Sir Count."

"Yes; doubtless she will prefer to do that. For there never was a bird so beautiful, so graceful, so touched with the soft hues of romance that

the soul of a man was able to keep it before it to gaze upon. This is some princess out of an Arabian story. We shall find, dear friend, that there is no flesh and blood in her. She came to us out of the air, and to-morrow at dawn we shall find her resolved again into that element."

"In the meantime we will be of good courage, Sir Count, and dream upon her—"

"In all her lilywhite daintiness, which was never so dustily and coarsely clad."

The Count of Nullepart took forth his music yet again, and played a final melody; one which in grave sweetness and fantasy and delicacy of passion was more than equal to all the others. We then drained our cups and fell into slumber presently, with our heads on the table at which we sat.

I suppose we must both have been dreaming of that vision that had made poetry of our ideas, and I suppose that proud and beautiful face, which was yet so bright with youth, and so grave with its coquetry, may even have revealed itself through the mists of the brain, for at some hour towards two of the clock of the summer's darkness we sprang to our feet with that imperious voice in our ears.

"To me, my friends, to me!" was the cry we heard.

Together we sprang from the settle, and ran to the stairs.

"To me, my friends, to me!" we heard the cry

again. It was clear and spreading, yet withal it was the voice of a child.

Running pell-mell up the dark stairs, for as yet the dawn had made no sign, we found standing at their head, as staunch as a spear, the small princess we were pledged to serve. Above her head she held a taper.

"I thank you, friends, I find you vigilant," she said in a voice she might have used upon two honest hounds that had pleased her well with their fidelity. She gave us the tips of her slender fingers to caress, and then returned to her chamber with a calm disdain that filled us with a kind of passion.

During the remainder of the night there was no more sleep for her two faithful servants, who went back to their table and passed the hours till dawn casting the dice and descanting upon her beauty.

At the first beams of day we went forth into the streets of the sleeping city, walking arm-in-arm and discussing the adventures that were likely to befall us. The Count of Nullepart was a man of some thirty years of age, and so deeply versed in the ways of the world that he viewed this odd matter in the light of a diversion rather than as a truly momentous affair.

"I do not love you the less, Don Miguel," he said, "because you are entranced by this fair unknown. But you must not take it amiss if I follow your ravishment at a respectful distance. She is indeed a sweet thing, and of an infinite caprice, and we must indeed be grateful for her

boldness, wherever it may lead. It may enable us to forget the world for a season; and above all, my dear Don Miguel, is not that the aim of a ripe philosophy?"

It surprised me that my comrade should permit himself such a whimsical indifference upon this subject; yet, after all, I was moved to the reflection that it was not so surprising neither, as he appeared to be of her kin.

The way led us directly to the market square, whereupon the Count of Nullepart insisted upon proceeding to the identical spot in which we had first became acquainted.

"That was an unequal combat, my dear Don Miguel, you waged with the horse-dealer," he said, laughing. "I never derived a greater pleasure from anything than the manner in which your own delicate and gentle wits endeavoured to surmount the nimble ones of that hard-featured rogue."

"I believe," said I, "that yesterday was the turning-point of my life. In the forenoon I suffered a grievous hap; in the afternoon I gained a dear friend; and in the evening I set my eyes upon the mistress who is to be the pole-star of my fortune."

Having uttered this prophecy, I recited to my companion the noble words of Don Ygnacio touching this matter. He smiled his approval of them, and assured me that my father must have been a great gentleman. We then retraced our steps to the inn, lest we should keep our wonderful lady waiting. Yet as we made towards it, the Count

of Nullepart in his whimsical fashion vowed we should find her flown.

CHAPTER XIV.

OF THE JOURNEYING BACK TO THE HOUSE OF MY REJECTION.

However, the Count of Nullepart was wrong in this particular. For on returning to the Three Feathers, we found her supping porridge with the greatest zest, with two servants to wait upon her. We were in time to hear her rate the landlord soundly because her couch had been hard; also to hear her put innumerable questions to that honest fellow as to whether her horse was shoed? what kind of smith it was that shoed it? was the shoe likely to give comfort to the horse? and was it calculated to cause no injury?

"Not that the horse is mine, fellow, you understand that?" said the little lady, who looked as fresh as peach bloom, and who appeared to keep her small head full of practical affairs.

"Oh yes, your ladyship, I quite understand that," said the innkeeper, with an air of the profoundest intelligence.

"I suspect you stole it, madam, from the Mother Superior," said the Count of Nullepart, taking up the conversation with a silken air.

"Why should you suspect that, sir?" said she, flashing upon the count the instant glance of a hawk.

"I have two eyes, madam," said he, smiling, "something of mind, and my five wits—although I have no respect for them, and deplore their use—are yet pointed as finely as five daggers. I am sure you stole your horse from the Mother Superior."

"How so, sirrah? And why so? And what do you mean?" said the lady, flinging her questions at him scornfully, and tapping her foot on the ground with petulance.

"I have been thinking upon you during the night," said the Count of Nullepart, "and have allowed myself to conclude that you are run away from your convent on the horse of the Mother Superior, which fetches home the eggs and butter from market."

"Well, sir, and if I am run away," said the lady haughtily, "I would not have you mention it in this public place. I have many reasons for running away, and the first of them is my father's peril."

"May I ask you, madam," said the Count of Nullepart, with a smile lurking at the corners of his mouth, "will it alleviate your father's peril, which I do not doubt is great, that you run away from your convent on the horse of the Mother Superior?"

"Why, sir, indeed it will," said she. "All his days, my father, his lordship's grace, hath been but as a child in statecraft; and being, as he conceives, insufficiently able to mismanage his own policy, he must needs in matters of great pith and delicacy call in the aid of an old fat man to embroil them further."

"And so, madam," said the Count of Nullepart gravely, "you must needs run away on the Mother Superior's horse—the only horse, by the way, I believe she possesses, which itself is slightly lame of the spavin—in order that you may bear your infinite wisdom and your ripe experience to the councils of your august male parent, his lordship's grace, the Duke of Where-is-it?"

"For what reason, sir, do you adjudge my father to be of that degree?"

"I adjudge it, madam, from the demeanour of his daughter. I called you highness at a venture, and you corrected me. But unless these five wits of mine, whose sharpness is forever disgracing me, have fallen into disuse, there is not less than ducal blood in your veins, although 'highness' be not the nature of your title."

"Your wits are shrewd, sir," said the lady, "and your mind is subtle. You have unmasked me, sir, you have torn away my cloak; and although I do not thank you for it, after all, I don't grieve much. My father is the Duke of Montesina, dwelling at five leagues' distance, and he is in unhappy case."

You may conceive, reader, with what concern I heard these words. Fortune had indeed reserved for me a precious trick. I was to journey back to the house of my rejection in the suite of one upon whose service I had staked every hope. Overwhelmed by as great a conflict of feeling as I had ever known, I could not forbear from disclosing my ill adventure of the previous day. I am by

no means clear that such an act was becoming in a gentleman thus to unbosom himself to this daughter of a high grandee, who on her account had used him without civility. But as I laid bare my misfortunes to this imperious lady I seemed to fail altogether in mastery of myself, being unable to command my unlucky tongue.

However, the consequences of such an indiscretion were in nowise unhappy. This noble lady listened to my words; and when I had spoken to her of my dismissal, merely because I had hoped to serve her, such a flame darkened her cheek, her eyes flashed so finely, her lips grew so tremulous with anger, and she gave me her hand with a gesture so pitiful and yet so superb that I found myself to be trembling with joy.

"Oh, that old man!" she cried. "Oh, that old man, he will be my death! But I see the hand of that fat man in this. If that fat man walk not warily, I will have him thrown into a dungeon with his bulk and everything else."

Such a resolute anger as possessed her at this recital of my tale I never saw. I could not help recalling that of her father at the moment he supplied the present occasion for it. And it so chanced that the innkeeper, who was still standing by and paying his service to her, was himself a fat man with a goodly paunch. Therefore she caused him to supply the room of the offender, whoever he might be, and he was doubtless Don Luiz, the duke's gentleman-usher; for in a true manner of femininity, which filled the Count of Nullepart

with joy, she addressed the whole of her dislike of grossness to this unfortunate fellow.

"I hate a fat man," she said, looking at the stout landlord ruthlessly. "I am always filled with disgust by such enormous bulks. If I ever come to the state of power, I will have every fat man broke upon the wheel; and when I take over the governance of my father's province, as I mean to do this very afternoon, I will at once enact an ordinance whereby every fat man within my dominion shall receive an hundred blows with a stick."

The poor innkeeper, who for one of his tribe was an honest fellow, began to tremble horribly and to sweat like a horse.

"Annually," she said, with such a truculent look that I marvelled how so fair a countenance could compass it, "an hundred blows."

"Poor fellows!" said the Count of Nullepart. "Poor fat men, won't they cry out!"

"There will never be such crying heard in Spain for many a year. I will have it ordained that the sticks be edged with sharp pieces of wire. Get you from my sight, you foolish, fat, lubberly fellow, else you shall be the first to receive your merit."

The innkeeper needed no second admonition to retire, for upon this speaking her ladyship ordered the Count of Nullepart to procure her riding-whip from the corner of the room. When the Count of Nullepart brought forth this implement with an extremely grave face, it looked so formidable as to justify the landlord in his flight

Yet how one fashioned so delicately would have been able to wield such an enormous weapon was beyond the comprehension of both the Count of Nullepart and myself.

The instancy of the lady's anger being past, she turned to the Count of Nullepart, who still preserved the utmost gravity in his mien, and said in a proud voice, which yet had nothing of its recent displeasure, "I am led to think, sir, you have a wise and a subtle mind. I will see to it that you are admitted into my counsels. What, sir, is your name and your degree?"

The Count of Nullepart informed her of his titles in his melodious accent.

"I am not displeased, sir," said she, "that you are a man of birth. But I had already adjudged it by your address. Now, my friends, as soon as you have broken your fasts we will to horse. Five hot and dusty leagues lie before us up the side of a steep mountain. We must not tarry, else we shall not find the sun to be our friend."

We did not venture to court her disapproval, which certainly, as we had just had the proof, could be of the most imperious nature, by lingering over our matutinal wine and meat. For myself, I ate my breakfast in a state of high excitement. I could do nothing but think of the subtle trick that fortune had set upon me. I was overjoyed to feel that by the stroke of Providence I was to be permitted to prove my quality. All my dreams, my ambitions, the wide vista opened to the view by my father's wisdom and prophetic

foresight, were suddenly offered an ample field in which to bear a golden fruit.

It was between six and seven o'clock of the summer's morning when the horse of our youthful mistress was led out of its stall. It proved to be a shambling old white palfrey, as halt as a cow, and nearly as blind as a stone. Before the lady would suffer herself to be mounted she must needs examine its new shoe, which, happily for the smith, whoever he might be, had been laid on craftily enough to obtain the sanction of her goodwill and pleasure.

By the time this ancient quadruped had been led forth into the inn yard, and had fully justified the title of "a notorious milk and butter carrier," as applied to it by the Count of Nullepart, I had determined, come what might, to be the foremost in helping our mistress into the saddle. I had contrived it that I should stoop to her and put out my hand with great alacrity, yea, I had even got so far as to clasp her boot in my palm, when, of a sudden motion, the Count of Nullepart took her round the middle without more ado, and deposited her, whip and all, upon the back of her palfrey with as little concern as if she had been a bundle of feathers.

I think we were both proud men as we rode forth of the inn yard in such society. Yet, if I must speak the truth, I was on ill terms with myself for having lacked the count's boldness. Still, the manner in which he had taken her out of my grasp came very near to violence. And so far was she

from checking him for his forwardness that she appeared, with some perversity as I conceived, to hold it nothing to his detriment. For all through the city she requitted what I was forced to consider a rude importunity with the favour of her entire conversation.

"Do I take it, madam," said the Count of Nullepart, "that your father, his lordship's grace, has the whole of this fair city for his dominion?"

"No, sir," said the lady, with petulance; "it is under the sway of the Archbishop of Toledo, a crafty and meddlesome priest. If my father had had a better thrift, so that his coffers had a richer lining, and the sharpest of his enemies were not like to be at his gate, I would urge him to wrest this fair town from this hateful churchman and put the old rascal to the sword."

As she spoke these words in her fine clear speech, she swept a glance of so much splendour over the crowding gabled roofs, the trees and bazaars, and the tall spires of the churches, as plainly showed that that sweetly delectable form harboured a spirit that was bold and warlike. Nor was her utterance a light one. She did not speak for several minutes, for her words had caused her to fall into a muse.

"One of these days," she said at last, "I shall bring an army into this city; one of these days this fair town shall be mine. You see, my friend, I stand next to my father; I am heiress of all his demesne. And I do tell you, my friend, that when the Countess Sylvia comes to her inheritance, and good soldiers and good treasure are at her beck,

she will ride on a milk-white courser at the head of more than a thousand beautiful fighting soldiers, each clad in a corslet of steel as bright as a mirror, with a long white plume in his cap, and the motto of her house painted in scarlet upon a cloth of white camlet upon his breast. And she shall sack this fair city, and see to it that all Jews, heretics, and Moriscoes are put to the sword. And this snuffling old priest, this archbishop who at present holds the city in her despite, she will nail by the ears to that gate yonder—do you not see it, my friend, peeping out of the cork trees beside yonder fountain which hath the water playing ? "

" Upon my soul," said the Count of Nullepart, holding in his horse to give a better scope to his gravity, " I never heard a speech so full of statesmanship. Do I speak the future Queen of Castile, I wonder ? Do I speak the future Queen of all Spain ? "

" My thoughts are not concerned with so large a title, sir ; I do but desire that my father defend his right and that I defend mine."

" Yet you would quell the archbishop, most noble countess," said the Count of Nullepart, laughing softly.

" That is not because I am covetous, sir, but because I have my ideas. It is a presumption for a priest to hold a city. Let him keep to the burning of heretics, and draw a revenue from the Holy Synod, not hold a demesne in fee to the prejudice of his betters."

" Well, madam," said the Count of Nullepart, beginning to shake in his saddle, " more advanced

views I never heard put forward by a lady of eighteen. If the ladies of future ages are to be of such stern clay as yours, I foresee that there will be neither religions, dynasties, nor empires upon the face of the globe. I foresee the day to be at hand when everything of my unfortunate sex will be put to the sword, and trunk hose will cease to be the pledge of a valiant simplicity."

The Count of Nullepart, who, for all his melancholy and sad look, was much addicted to laughter, kept chuckling in a stealthy manner at these speeches of our fair companion. And she, dear soul, was far from observing him, being engrossed too deeply in her own designs; besides, such an air as she wore would have rendered it impossible for her to believe that any person could have been excited to mirth by her conversation.

You will suppose that I felt myself out of countenance a little by not receiving a share of the lady's notice; but however much I might chafe at my inability to inspire it, fortune presently played into my hands. The Count of Nullepart, already installed as the favourite, either failed to appreciate or did not choose to consider that the eminence to which he had ascended carried its responsibilities. For, as we wound along the steep paths which led to the castle, we passed, under the shadow of a rock, a strapping rustic peasant girl with a laughing face, bright eyes and cheeks, and a nosegay at her bosom. As we came upon this handsome wench, the Count of Nullepart gazed at her long and particularly, and even permitted himself to express an open approval

of her beauty. From that moment our fair companion paid him no more regard. Immediately she turned to me, riding upon her left hand, and proceeded to converse in a most grave and dignified manner.

All the rest of the way I had that arch and imperious voice to myself. Several times its owner pointed with her riding-whip to the fair prospect that was unfolded from this steep hill. I can never forget this picture of the corn-fields, the oak trees, the cattle browsing upon the mountain slopes, which were clad in the fierce white sun. Little rivers ran down shining and sparkling to the Tagus, that fine broad ribbon belted with diamonds which ran to hide itself in the fair city below.

"One day all this will be under my sway as far as the eyes can scan," said the Countess Sylvia, "and that goodly city that lies below shall be the capital of my dominion."

When we rode up to the gate of the castle I was put in mind of my previous misfortune. My heart began to beat as the scene returned upon me. I saw myself rejected for the second time, or perchance cast into a dungeon. Yet it was only for a moment that I permitted myself to embrace these fears. For I reflected that this weakness was no part of valour, and that at my side was one who, young as she was, was a beautiful and fearless protectress. In the eyes of her whom I was pledged to serve was that which put vacillation to the blush.

At the first blow I gave to the gate it swung back as before; yet upon our admission, in spite of the presence of the Lady Sylvia, the same formalities

had to be enacted as on the previous occasion. She was unknown to the soldiers at the gate, and we had to await, upon her part with the greatest impatiency, the arrival of the captain of the guard.

He received her ladyship with a profound obeisance which did but add fuel to her displeasure. She turned upon him in the most instant manner, and cried, pointing to those who had declined to allow her to proceed, "Put those soldiers in durance. Let them receive a bastinado apiece."

"But may it please your ladyship," said the captain of the guard, "they have only been in the service of his grace a twelvemonth; and never having had the honour of seeing your ladyship, they knew you not."

"If you venture to pass words with me, sirrah," said the Countess Sylvia, "you shall go to a dungeon yourself. By my life, it is well I am come home! Even you dogs of soldiers have forgot your duty; but, by my good soul, I will have it rectified."

With the arrogance of a queen she disdained the service of the Count of Nullepart, but allowed me to lift her from the saddle. Gathering up her coarse grey garments, she bade the cowed and abashed captain of the guard, a swollen and overbearing fellow with a pair of moustachios that were capable of striking terror into the boldest heart, and who might have concealed his mistress altogether in the capacious folds of his gaberdine, conduct her to her father.

Asking leave of none and standing upon no

formality, we all three passed directly to that apartment of which I had had such a bitter experience. I must confess, to my shame, that, as again I entered it and beheld all those objects that were imprinted on my mind so indelibly, I was sensible of a grave uneasiness.

As on the previous day, the duke was seated on his high chair, with the dwarf at his back. At the appearance of his daughter he rose with a sharp exclamation of surprise. He came forward to greet her, and she met him gently with all her anger cooled, and received his embrace with every mark of pleasure.

"But this is most singular," said the duke, when he had bestowed these marks of affection. "What do you here, my delightful one? How have you travelled? In what manner have you been accompanied?"

"My lord," she answered, "I am here of your kingdom's business. I have travelled upon an old horse I took of the mother superior; and I have been accompanied part of the journey by my five wits, and the other part of it by these two honest gentlemen, whom I now present to your lordship's grace."

"Oh and soh!" said the duke, after accepting our obeisances with a disapproval he could ill conceal. "This is a very ill and froward matter."

It alarmed me to see his face grow red and to hear the harsh manner in which he spoke these words. He put his daughter in no fear, however.

"Yes, your lordship," she said calmly. "Being

arrived at the age of eighteen years, and knowing well that a wise and mature mind was needed to direct your affairs, which the old fat man, your lordship's chief councillor, hath embroiled for so long a season, I deemed it time, being arrived at eighteen years I say, to repair to the service of your lordship."

I think a great man can seldom have been gravelled so badly as was the duke at these words. He could but open his mouth and gasp.

"But—but—but—" he cried in a splutter, "you leave your convent without permission, you ride alone into dangerous places, you take up with strangers along the road, and you dare—you dare, madam, to bring them here to me! By my hand, madam, this is intolerable. You shall go back to your convent immediately, and you shall be whipped."

There never was such a staunch glance, I think, as that with which the Countess Sylvia met the petulant anger of her parent.

"This is feeble talk, my lord," she said boldly. "I have not adventured a five days' journey upon an old horse of most ridiculous paces to hear such speaking as this. Many rumours have reached me in my convent of what was toward in the world. I have even heard of the design of the infamous King John to turn you forth of this castle, which you and yours, my lord, have held by right of main for four hundred years. Answer me, my lord, is not this so? is not this King John of Castil about to take your manor?"

"Do not speak to me, madam," said the duke. "You shall go back to your convent at once. And as for these precious villains that you have picked out of some infamous venta, they shall spend the rest of their lives in a prison."

The angry duke, having directed a glance of the most desperate contempt at the Count of Nullepart and myself, sent the dwarf for Don Luiz, even as he had done on the previous occasion.

"Ods, my life, madam," he said, "I think you must be mad!"

When that slow-moving, austere, and portentous Don Luiz, who was yet so girt about with arrogance and dignity, appeared in the wake of the natural, it was plain enough that he was no other than that fat man the recollection of whom had moved the little countess to such a deep disgust. As he entered with a grunt and a wheeze, she clenched her hands and looked upon him with the most disdainful effrontery, although she spoke not a word.

"Here is a matter, Luiz; here is a matter," cried the duke, breaking out into a wail. "Mark yon little venom there; do you mark her? Run away, Luiz; run away from her convent. Do you have her taken back immediately, and she is to be flogged soundly."

"Your grace shall be obeyed," said Don Luiz heavily.

"And further, Luiz," said the old grandee, who apparently was stimulated by the presence of his trusty gentleman-usher, "these two villainous rapscallions whom she hath picked out of some hedge

tavern to accompany her, and who, as you see, have had the effrontery to beard us in own our apartment, do you see to it, Luiz, that they are kept in a solitary dungeon for the remainder of their lives. Or I put it to you, Luiz—I shall cherish your advice upon this matter—would it be properer to have them hanged at once for such a piece of mischief ? "

I know not what were the feelings of the Count of Nullepart, but I have to confess, good reader, that for myself I have seldom been thrown into a greater concern. From the light in which the duke chose to view this affair, our action in venturing to beard him in his own apartment at the instance of a mischievous truant, on so bare a pretext, did indeed savour of folly and presumption. And Don Luiz was fain to take the same view of our conduct as his master, for, after collecting his wits, with a wonderful solemnity he answered, " I consider, my lord, you will do well to hang them."

CHAPTER XV.

OF SOME FROWARD PASSAGES BEFORE THE DUKE.

" Don Luiz," said our young mistress, speaking with a sternness that was remarkably dignified, " you will do well to hold your peace. You are now dismissed from that high position which you have occupied so unworthily for I know not how many years. Your emoluments are reduced by one half, and even then, Don Luiz, your fees will be above

your services. From this moment I myself, Don Luiz, am to occupy the room of first councillor to his lordship's grace; for I have to inform you that matters of the greatest instancy are like to be toward, and it will need a bold heart, a firm will, and a ripe judgment to direct his affairs."

If the duke had been taken aback by the entrance of his daughter, his demeanour could not compare with that of his councillor when assailed by these calm words that were uttered so impressively.

"Ods nig and nog!" cried the duke, "these are words, madam, these are words. Am I lived to seventy years and three to be browbeat in mine own presence by a rib out of mine own flesh! By my troth, I will have you scourged, madam; I will have you scourged. Take her away, Luiz, or I shall fall into such a passion that I shall say something grievous."

"My lord," said the Countess Sylvia, "am I a cook-maid that I should be mentioned in this manner? Have I journeyed five days on an old horse, under the heat of the sun, to serve the grace of your lordship that I should be spoken to rudely by your lordship's grace?"

"Bah and pooh!" said the duke. "Get you away, you wicked hulks. Go, do you hear me, naughty one! Out of my sight, I say! As for these foul villains by whom thou art accompanied, such a tight string shall be drawn about their throats as shall cause them to fling up their heels in the air."

The Countess Sylvia, however, was undaunted

by the choleric rage of his lordship's grace. For she had a goodly anger of her own to set before him, which was accompanied by the stamping of her foot and exceeding large turbulent tears.

"Out of my presence, spitfire!" said the duke.

"My lord," said the little countess, "I leave the presence of your lordship at no command save mine own."

"Dost thou defy me, rude one?" said the duke. "Ods nick and nack! I will go to a main extremity. Luiz, do you remove her; cast her out, Luiz. Ods my good soul! must I be bearded in mine own presence by a rib of mine own flesh."

This starched and dignified grandee had long thrown his ceremonious mien to the wind. He walked up and down his apartment, pishing and tushing, snapping his fingers and almost weeping with anger.

"Dost thou hear me, Luiz? Put her out, I say, put her out! Or wouldst thou have me do it, Luiz, with the reverend hand of mine own paternity?"

Don Luiz approached the little countess warily enough, as though he were not so fond of his task. The proud madam drew herself up into an aspect of the most splendid fierce grandeur.

"Do not touch me, fat man," she said. "Do not lay so much as a finger upon my gown, or, as I am a person, you shall swing, bulk and everything, from the topmost turret of this castle. From this day I am master here and mistress too."

The abashed fat man stopped and hesitated and looked at the duke despairingly.

"Luiz, Luiz," said his master, "why do you not take her by the shoulders and put her out of the room? Or would you have me do it, Luiz, by the might of mine own paternity?"

It was clear, although Don Luiz made no such confession, that he would have preferred that his august master should have put the countess out of the room by the might of his own paternity. But the Lady Sylvia's baffled parent showed no disposition to come near her; and, fume as he would, there appeared to be nothing in his nature to compel the enforcement of his authority. Finding himself in the imminent danger of defeat, for Don Luiz still remained tardy and unwilling, he had recourse, as was only to be expected of a weak and inferior spirit, to those offenders who were not so well placed to outface his wrath.

"Luiz," he said, "I would have you summon the guard, and arrest these two cut-throats that madam hath picked out of a hedge tavern; and do you see to it that they hang in a quarter of an hour."

The gentleman-usher being much better able to execute this order than the former one, made haste to do so.

"My friends," said our mistress, who in her anger, her defiance, and her turbulence had never looked so adorable, "come to the high ground behind the table near the window. Draw your swords and play them well if you are pressed. But, as I am a person, they shall not dare to touch you. For mark it, and, your lordship's grace, do you mark it too, if one of these knaves so much as lays a finger against the doublet

of my friends, I will slay him with mine own poniard."

To make good her speech she turned to the dwarf and said in a voice of the highest courage, "Give me your dagger, sirrah."

Instead of obeying, the dwarf, with a vacuous grin, looked towards the duke for a direction. Before he could withdraw his gaze the countess had struck him on the cheek with the butt of the riding whip she still bore in her hand.

"Give me your dagger, sirrah," she repeated in a voice that was full of passion.

The dwarf, a wretched, misshapen hunchback, obeyed her with a scowl and a whimper. At the same moment there arose the measured clank of arms. The Count of Nullepart and myself, acting upon the natural instinct that directed our minds rather than upon the wisdom of our mistress which had yet bade us do so, drew our swords and climbed to the daïs.

Almost as we reached this eminence, Don Luiz came into the room with some half a dozen soldiers, whose swords were also drawn and who wore corslets of steel. At this sight a kind of haze fell across my eyes. Yet such an exaltation came upon my blood as never before had quickened it; and I gripped my weapon as though it had been the waist of a mistress, and awaited the onfall with joy.

"Behind the table, close to the wall," said the Count of Nullepart in a soft whispering voice which yet was perfectly calm. "Farther by the left a little, that we may play better. Straight at their faces. We shall get nothing out of these plaguy breastplates."

The Count of Nullepart also, if I am not mistaken, was fallen into my condition. I could hear the ring of joy in his voice. It would seem that here was his moment also. He too seemed to hold his blade like a lover.

As a prologue to the fray, no sooner had the soldiers entered the room and had fallen to attend the duke's instructions than the Countess Sylvia walked on to the daïs, and in the next moment had come to stand on the table itself, with her whip in one hand, her dagger in the other, and a good sword on either side of her.

From this singular eminence she gazed with an insolent contumely upon the forces that were being marshalled against us.

"Soldiers of the guard," she said, as though she were speaking to an army, "your bare swords are your peril. His lordship's grace is no longer your commander. He is an old man and a querulous; a dotard so shrunk in his wits that I hereby depose him. Myself as the mistress to his dominion do appoint myself to the regency. From this moment do I declare myself no less your master than your mistress. Here do I take my stance; here do I enforce my authority; and these virtuous gentlemen that keep at my side are your honourable captains. Sheathe your swords therefore, doff your bonnets, and like honest men do homage to your liege lady."

Now, I was never able to learn whether this wonderful speech was given—and you must believe me, reader, when I assure you it was no less wonder-

ful in its mode than in its form—for the behoof of his grace's soldiers or for that of his grace himself. At least it was not without an effect upon both. The guard looked at the duke in just such a fashion as Don Luiz and the dwarf had done; and he, like the dotard that at heart he was, began to whine and threaten and hurl abuse upon this noble intrepidity, and yet himself to stand irresolute.

"Ods wounds! I do not want to slay the little tiger-cat," he whined. "Take the dagger from her. You, sirrah, take the dagger from her, but I pray you do not hurt her."

The bearded warrior upon whom the duke called to execute this command seemed in nowise eager to enact a deed so delicate.

"Stand clear, you paltry ruffian!" said the little countess. "If you so much as touch my sleeve I will stab you."

In good sooth a proper discretion was necessary. The eminence upon which her ladyship stood and her perfect valiancy rendered it work for a bold man to come near her. Again, there was her dagger to consider, also a keen pair of blades flanking her sacred person one on each side.

It is easy to believe that such a situation was not without its humour. But for the three chief actors in this play, who stood shoulder to shoulder upon the daïs, it was grave indeed.

"Sirrah, sirrah!" cried the duke. "You with your beard under your chin, down with her, I say! Take away her dagger; or must I stand in the presence of insubordination?"

The soldier approached warily under the goad of the duke's wrath, and came up to our platform, with his mouth open wide like a stuck bear.

"Is there none that will heed me, Luiz?" cried the duke. "Is it come to this: must I conduct mine own business by mine own valiancy? Must I, sore smitten with the infirmity of my seventy years and three, take away this vixenish dagger with this ancient hand?"

"You are stricken in years, my lord," said his daughter; "you are speaking foolishly. Go you to bed, like a wise old man; the leech shall bleed you; and that fat fellow who is swollen like a goose at Michaelmas, shall read you a psalm."

"Ods mud!" cried her parent, spluttering himself into a state of incoherency, "will nobody pull her down? I ask you, will nobody pull her down? Will none obey me? Must I do it personally? Ods unicorns! must I correct her with mine own indignation?"

Instead of advancing, however, to do his own business, the duke was content to whine and complain, like an old dog that is wishful to bite, yet is unable. And it was most curious to watch this foiled grandee look first at Don Luiz, his right hand, and then at the soldiers of his guard. But these showed no disposition to help him in his pass. None had the desire to offer violence to their youthful mistress, who had so much more of valour than their aged master.

"Luiz," cried the duke, "do you fetch that foreign man, that Sirrah Richard Red Dragon.

He is the man to serve us. Ods myself! he will have no fear of three halfpence worth of bib and tucker, with a bit of steel to give it effrontery. Ods my good heart! he will not fear a minx and a wanton that is so rude as any jacknapes. Do you tell him to bring his stick along with him, Luiz; I will have her flogged in public for this. Ods my good soul! Luiz, I never was in such a passion before."

Don Luiz went forth on his new errand with great alacrity.

"You are as weak as a chewed straw, my lord," said little insolent madam. "Get you to your bed, like a good old man, and I will send you a priest with a fresh, young voice, and he shall sing you an anthem. You have no more valiancy than an old milch cow, my lord. You are as feeble as a gnat under a willow in a wet November. It is well I am come home. I believe your lordship's grace would deliver up this house to the Castilian the first time he set his hand upon your lattice."

It is hard to know what reply the duke would have offered to such an onslaught upon his old age, made by one of his own kith. But before he could frame it, in whatever it might consist, that huge man the Englishman entered the room with his sword drawn and snuffing like a tiger.

"If I am upon an errand of good steel," he said, coming in with a swagger that filled the whole apartment, "I hope there is a proper valiance in mine adversaries, for I am in a humour to cut and thrust, to hack and mutilate."

"Sirrah Richard Red Dragon," said the duke, with most perfect dignity, "I would have you pull down that proud hulks off the table there, and I would have you chastise her with severity; and further I would have you seize those two malefactors by whom she is encompassed, and I would have you hang them within a quarter of an hour."

Sir Richard Pendragon made one or two ferocious passes with his sword before laying this order into execution. He then cast his eyes, which were rolling in a truly terrible manner, towards where we held our ground. But instead of making the horrible onslaught we had been led to expect, he opened his mouth in astonishment. He then turned to gaze at the duke, who stood the picture of calm pride and dignity, and then back again to the no less calm and prideful countess.

"Ods my life! Sirrah Red Dragon," said the duke, "I am minded to be severe; I will use severity. Pull her down; do not spare her. But I would have thee see to it, good coz, that she do not stab thee."

In the meantime the English giant was still looking from the old duke to the youthful countess, from the youthful countess to the old duke. At last he threw his sword on the ground, pressed his great hands to his ribs, and broke into such a report of laughter that it rolled round the tall ceiling like the voice of the giant Fierabras.

"God's tomb!" he roared. "If I do not spit blood I shall never need surgery! If a most desperate fluxion does not surmount my poor brains I am no man. If I do not perish of an overwrought

mind I am a dog! By the holy ape of Barbary, I shall laugh till I shed large tears!"

"Ods nig and nog!" cried the duke, resuming his querulous manners. "Sirrah Red Dragon, will you reject me! Will you not do my bidding? Must I, who am old and a parent, pull down a she-wolf and correct her with the hand of mine own indignation? Ods nig and nog! is there no manhood in Spain?"

While the duke continued to fume and splutter in this unworthy fashion, the great English giant, and you must believe me, reader, when I tell you he appeared to be as enormous as the heroes and ogres in the old romances, continued to press on his ribs, and, even as he had himself predicted, to shed veritable tears of laughter. But presently the mien of the Countess Sylvia seemed to pacify this great coarse fellow. For, as she stood gazing from her eminence with majestic looks, small as she was and fragile, she was indeed a figure to touch the heart of a gallant warrior.

"By my hand," said the Englishman, abating his mirth into a true admiration. "If this is not a piece of true mettle I am a rogue. Why, thou sweet thing, thou art as red in the cheek as a carnation."

"Sirrah ruffian!" said the little Countess Sylvia, exposing her stiletto; "I would have you 'ware me. I will kill you if you come near."

"There, hearken to her, hearken to her!" cried the duke. "Did I not say she was a spitfire? Did I not say she was a proud and wicked hulks?"

"Come near thee!" said the English barbarian, "why, thou beautiful thing, thou art a rose, a flower! Thou hast a light in thy eye like a bud in June. I've a mind to buss thee for thy prettiness."

"Is there no manhood abroad in the world?" cried the duke; "will no man pull her down?"

Instead of paying heed to the duke, Sir Richard Pendragon made the little Countess Sylvia a deep obeisance.

"This is the fairest rose in bud I have seen this moon," he said, laying his hand across his doublet. "By this hand you have my love, pretty titmouse, and your whip and your dagger, they have it too."

Upon this address a stern and sudden joy flamed in the eyes of the Countess Sylvia.

The English giant, who even from the low ground towered above her, table and all, was now come to stand before her. Without heeding the duke, the soldiers, or Don Luiz, he kept his eyes upon her face, as if enchained by its beauty, while all seemed so much amazed by the audacity of his behaviour in standing without arms within striking distance of her poniard, and yet to address her in such terms, that none moved a step nor dared to interrupt their intercourse.

"Sirrah Red Dragon," said the Countess Sylvia, "I know not who you are, or whence you come, or what is your virtue, or what is your detriment; but by my two eyes I judge you to be a true man and a valiant warrior. And here I stand, the mistress of this castle and the whole of its furniture; and I am prepared to enforce my resolve by power

of the sword if the need arise, for I grieve to inform you that my father, his lordship's grace, hath fallen suddenly so senile in his years, that I am called to be his nurse as well as his daughter; therefore, Sirrah Red Dragon, whoever you may be, I would have you obey my behests. And they are these. Put out those spawn in their steel corslets, put them out, I say, into the antechamber; and then do take that fat man there, who is so gross as a pig and so round as a barrel, and do you lock him up in an iron cage, and feed him upon husks, until you receive our further advice upon the subject."

"By the Lord Harry!" cried Sir Richard Pendragon, beaming with joy, "this is as fine loud speaking as ever I heard. By this hand! this is Charlemagne in a kirtle and mutch!"

Indeed, scarcely had the Countess Sylvia spoken to this tenor, than this gigantical foreigner, who was as great in his valour as he was in his girth, fell suddenly upon the fellow that was next to him, who, to be sure, was a somewhat puny man-at-arms, picked him up by an ear and a limb, as though he were a truss of fodder, and carried him out of the room bodily. Whereupon, the other warriors, who, like men of the ranks, must have a leader before they can act, now having none—for the duke was impotent before this new affront to his authority, and Don Luiz was too fat in the wits and swollen with base living to appear better than a cypher—knew not whether to offer resistance or to submit. And as it was ever the easier to adopt the latter than the former course, and as their choice in the

matter was but small, when Sir Richard Pendragon returned and took up his sword, he drove them before him out of the chamber with the flat of it, like so many hogs along a lane.

CHAPTER XVI.

OF THE GRIEVOUS MISHANDLING OF HIS LORDSHIP'S GRACE.

YOU are now to remark, gentle reader, that this beautiful creature, whom three humble courtiers of fortune were about to serve with their faith, had, in addition to a nature of truly noble valiancy, a knowledge of affairs that was highly pertinent, and a wit that was wonderful indeed for one so tender in her years.

So soon as the English giant fell to driving the duke's men-at-arms before him like sheep, she ordered the Count of Nullepart and myself to leave the daïs. We were advised to take up a new position between the door, Don Luiz, and the duke. And when the Englishman returned with a smile of humour about his mouth, yet breathing somewhat hard with his exercise, the Countess Sylvia addressed her three servants in a low voice.

"Forth of this, my friends. Let the door be secured behind us, so that they cannot break out; and as there is no other, they shall play with their thumbs for an hour while we prepare them a strategy."

In the pursuit of this piece of wisdom, the four of us slipped into the antechamber, while the foolish old duke, who had appeared utterly to fail under the stress of these affairs, was still using so much querulousness to his trusty gentleman-usher that he did not observe the latest device of his daughter. Thus was he none the wiser for our escape, nor for the project that was presently to be set afoot for his undoing.

In the antechamber were the six soldiers who had been so mishandled by one purposeful man of brawn. They stood in a group, regarding us with unintelligent, goat-like eyes. Her ladyship turned upon them, and said scornfully, "Do you go and summon the smiths out of the armoury, you paltry knaves. Send them here with their tools immediately."

She then commanded the Count of Nullepart, Sir Richard Pendragon, and myself to stand with drawn swords before the door leading to the duke's apartment, so that neither he nor his councillor should pass out before it was sealed.

"Why, madam, these precautions?" asked the Count of Nullepart.

"It is my intention to draw out every fang that this old bear hath in his chaps," said the Countess Sylvia.

"How so, and why so, madam? Do you propose to wall up your old father, his lordship's grace, and do him to death with good Don Paunch, his trusty fat man?"

"You ought to be wise, sir; you ask many

questions," said madam imperiously. "But perhaps it were not amiss if I unfolded my design to my good followers."

"That is well spoke, thou sweet bud of the rose garden," said Sir Richard Pendragon. "Let us hear whether thy dear little poll be a proper comrade to thy valiance."

"Stand you to the door then, friends, and this is my design. While his lordship's grace is stewing and sweating in durance with that fat fellow, and braying like an old mule for his liberty, I will have every one of his three hundred men-at-arms answer to the roster. I will issue a proclamation, by which they shall learn that in the person of their mistress they have a new master; and each shall take the oath of his fealty in his new service. And I will cause the master-armourer and the master-treasurer to do the same, for I have to tell you, my friends, that henceforward this castle is to have only one generalissimo."

"Marry and amen!" said the Count of Nullepart, bowing low before her.

"By my hand!" said the English giant, imitating the Count of Nullepart in this particular with as much grace as his inches and his nation could arrange, "Harry of England breathes again in this small thing. My sweet pretty ladyship, you have a right Pendragon at your elbow, under whose doublet flows the blood of kings. And if thy performance, perfect queen of the roses that thou art, be in anywise equal to thy disposition, one of these sunny mornings they shall crown thee Queen of all the Spains."

"No, my good Sirrah Red Dragon," said this beautiful creature, with a natural dignity that nought could surpass, "I ask no more than my right; I covet no dominion above my own. But that will I keep, God helping me! There is like to come a bitter enemy at the gate; yet when he rides up the hill and winds his trumpet, he shall find me within."

"If there is not statecraft and good politics behind that cheek of damask," cried the Englishman, "I am a micher and a thief in the night."

"Madam," said I, feeling the same enthusiasm, "Miguel Jesus Maria de Sarda y Boegas will yield you no lack in your affairs. They have a strong hand to guide them, which they appear to need, but upon the honour of my father Don Ygnacio, and under the gracious permission of your ladyship, I will not forswear your service while blood grows in my veins."

Hardly had I spoken than Sir Richard Pendragon began to roar like a heifer.

"That name again!" he cried. "Ods life I can feel a fluxion! A surgeon, or I perish!"

"Don Miguel," said the Countess Sylvia with the gravest simplicity, and paying no heed whatever to this unmannerly outcry of the English barbarian, "I do need your good service, and I cherish it."

Upon these words, spoken as became a princess, I fell to my knee and saluted the hand of this valiant and noble lady.

"If I am not blind like a newt, this is my former

squire that ran away from me," said Sir Richard Pendragon. "How came you again in this parish, youthful varlet? But as I am a good Christian man, I am glad to see thee. My young companion, I prithee, take my hand upon it."

Although I gave him a smile of courtesy, I did not accede to his request. For I had a lively recollection of his hand.

The arrival of the smiths put a term to our speeches. As soon as they began to seal up the door with screws and nails, the duke and Don Luis, immured within, were moved to try it. Finding that with all their shaking and rattling they could not come out, they set up a most desperate hullabaloo.

"Their throats will wear a little sooner than this honest wood," said our mistress sternly.

She then bade the smiths cease their hammering while she spoke his lordship's grace and his fat companion.

"My lord," she cried in her strong and clear young speech, "abate your old foolishness for the space of one minute. I do but intend to lock up your lordship's grace for the term of two hours, while I have deliverance made of your authority. I would have you play a game at mumchance with your trusty fat man, while I muster your three hundred men-at-arms and swear them to my service. If your lordship's grace will not babble so, and you will request that fat fellow whose bulk is so large as a bag, who is so undecent in his appearance as any sow that grouts in a kennel, if you will request him not to brawl so much, you will be

able to pass the time of day agreeably, and without that excitement that is so inclement to the mind."

"You speak like a physician, madam," said the Count of Nullepart. "Your words are as choice as though you held a diploma from the College of Surgeons."

"Aye, she speaks shrewd," said Sir Richard Pendragon, wagging his beard in cordial admiration of this beautiful and masterful thing. "She is fit to advise a kingdom; one of these days she shall speak from a throne to her respectful parliament. My dear and intimate friend, the Dowager-Empress and Queen Mother of the Austrian nation, never spoke better sooth than she; never spoke it with a better use of tongue and of language; never spoke it with a more subtle penetration of wit or a more lofty and wise demeanour. I speak thee fair, sweet ladyship and countess, and he who addresseth thee hath the blood of kings under his doublet, don't forget that. By my sword, if thou wert but of the English nation, I would ask thine hand in matrimony, thou lovely chit, and Betty Tucker, a good wench who can handle a tankard as well as another at the sign of the 'Knight in Armour' public-house, next the town of Barnet, in the kingdom of Great Britain, should hang herself in her shift or strangle herself in her garters."

Much of that which followed of our conversation next the door of the duke's apartment was drowned by the incessant beating and brawling upon the panel of those behind it. But the wood was staunch, and already the smiths had the most of it

screwed up. When they had finished their task, and the Countess Sylvia was assured that his lordship's grace and his fat companion could not possibly come out, she dismissed the smiths, and sent for the captain of the guard.

"Caballero," she said to this worthy, "I would have you assemble immediately our three hundred men-at-arms. Have them drawn up in line of battle in the great courtyard, and let them appear in full accoutrement. For I am about to speak to them, and to swear each mother's son to fealty upon the sword."

"She speaks like a queen!" cried the English giant, with a roar of delight. "Betty Tucker, if thine ear doth not burn with jealousy as thou drawest that pot of small ale for that low jack pudding with a ring in his lug, thou art no true woman. Thou little knowest, good Bet o' the Bib and Tucker—a weak jest, yet of mine own contrivance—thou little knowest the imminent danger of our banns that were asked five years come Maundy Thursday at St. Clement's Church in London City."

"Sirrah Red Dragon," said the Countess Sylvia with a sternness that cowed the English barbarian, "cease your babblements. You are a big man, but you talk too much. Accompany me to the master armourer and help inhabit me in a corslet and a steel cap; and if you will not use the same bulk of language that you have of inches, you shall choose me a good honest blade that I may bear in mine hand."

"By cock," cried Sir Richard Pendragon, "she speaks as shrewishly as Betty when she hath been drinking cognac."

The English giant, who might have borne the little Countess Sylvia within the sleeve of his jerkin, accompanied her to the armoury with a spreading yet withal something of a crestfallen air.

When they had passed the Count of Nullepart sat himself down on a settle, and with a face twisted with mirth took forth his instrument and strove to improvise a melody. Three times did he essay to do so and three times did he fail.

"I am laughing myself into my tomb," said he. "That is why I am so thin and frail, my dear Don Miguel. All my days I have been cursed with a passion for laughter, and it wears me to the bone. Oh, my good soul! do you not hear his lordship's grace beating his loud tattoos upon yonder panel?"

"Do you still believe, dear Count of Nullepart, that our adorable one will evanish into the air?"

"Yes, my friend, so far as she is any concern of ours. That English giant will carry her off."

"Never, Sir Count, as I am a caballero. He is a barbarian, an uncivil Goth, a rude fellow. Besides, hath she not already punished the presumption of his speech?"

"She is a woman, dear Don Miguel, and remark me, she will do something whimsical. You and I, my dear, are men of the first ton, as they say at Paris, but this barbarous giant, this ruffling English swaggerer, is already the apple of that fine

bright eye. Mark me, dear Don Miguel, he is the hero. Did she ask you to choose a piece for her head at the armoury and a sword for her hand; did she ask me? Not so, my dear friend. She asks this gigantic island Goth, this swaggerer. And there you have the whole of the female woman. Her mind resembles nothing so much as a game of dice. None shall dare to predict what is turned up in it: the double six at the first cast, at the second the double one."

The Count of Nullepart had scarcely got through this prologue to his philosophy when little madam, his thesis, returned with a proud walk, wearing a steel cap that was so big that it fitted down over her ears, a corslet of the same complexion that fell down over her knees, while in her small hand was a piece of fine Toledo craftmanship which yet could not be called too delicate for a lady. How she could stagger along at all under these accoutrements was a matter for surprise. Yet not only did she do so, but also she contrived to invest her gait with its natural dignity. At her side walked Sir Richard Pendragon, as near seven feet as no matter, while the peak of the little Countess Sylvia's helmet appeared to ascend hardly above his leg. Yet, as in accordance with the Count of Nullepart's prediction, they already seemed mighty close and pleasant with one another.

"My friends," said the Lady Sylvia, "I have duly appointed Sirrah Richard Red Dragon to the high office of master of my horse, captain generalissimo of my three hundred men-at-arms, and

captain of my guard, at an emolument of two thousand maravedis a month, including his victual."

"Three thousand, madam and ladyship, under your gracious pleasure and permission," said the Englishman.

"Did I say three, Sirrah Red Dragon? Dear, my good soul! my memory is weak. Well, Sirrah Red Dragon, three it shall be."

"To be disbursed in advance, worshipful madam and ladyship."

"So be it, Sirrah Red Dragon. Your first emolument shall be paid to you so soon as the master treasurer hath delivered to me the keys of the coffers of his lordship's grace."

"And I crave the permission of your ladyship to suggest that sack be included in the terms touching the victual."

"Sack shall be included, sirrah."

"Unlimited and without stint, madam, I trow and trust, and to be delivered if I knock once on the buttery door."

"Yes, indeed, good Sirrah Red Dragon, that is quite understood."

The giant showed his teeth in a grin of broad humour and smacked his lips complacently.

"Is there no post of honour in your household, madam, for the least of your servants?" asked the Count of Nullepart in his softest accent.

"You will be keeper of accounts, sir, and also I will appoint you to the mastership of the treasury."

"I thank you, madam, and make you my service," said the Count of Nullepart.

"I have a mind to be master of the treasury myself, brother," said Sir Richard Pendragon, pricking up his ears. "You shall be captain of the guard, brother, and I will take upon myself to hold the keys of the mint."

"Would you traffic in your offices, Sirrah Red Dragon?" said his mistress sternly. "I have a mind to remove you from the position of master of my horse, and reduce your emolument by a thousand maravedis."

A threat of this gravity had an instant effect upon the Englishman, who fell to silence and the stroking of his beard; yet it was clear above all things he yearned to hold the keys of the mint.

Our mistress now led the way to the great courtyard of the castle, where the three hundred men-at-arms were to be assembled. How she contrived to walk ten paces in her habiliments I know not, for, in addition to the steel with which her slight person was encumbered, her long riding skirt trailed over her heels.

However, before she came to the courtyard she must needs dispatch Sir Richard Pendragon for a milk-white courser, if such a steed was to be found in the stables of his lordship's grace; or failing a quadruped of that chaste hue, the master of the horse was to procure one as near to that condition as he could discover.

"Statecraft, dear lady, statecraft!" said the Count of Nullepart with an arch smile. "I perceive you are determined to present to your warriors the appearance of the goddess of battles."

Sir Richard Pendragon being unable to discover a courser of milk-white was fain to lead a palfrey of a dubious dapple colour into the austere presence of his mistress. She directed a glance upon it of the most instant disapproval.

"Is there no worthier thing than this, Sirrah Red Dragon?" she demanded haughtily.

"None, good countess, ladyship, and madam."

"Wherefore, sirrah, wherefore?" she demanded, beating her sword on her boot in a threatful manner. "You are the master of our horse, are you not, and you keep no milk-white courser for our use? How so, Sirrah Horse Master, wherefore and why?"

"Under your ladyship's good favour," said the giant humbly, "your good Dick, an old honest fellow, hath not been in his office more than twenty minutes."

"Answer my question, sirrah," stormed his mistress. "Why is there no milk-white courser for my use?"

Sir Richard Pendragon plucked at his beard furiously, and directed a sidelong look at the Count of Nullepart, who stood very upright and gazing before him as solemnly as an owl in a cold evening.

"I have the greatest mind, Sirrah Red Dragon, do you mark me," said the Countess Sylvia, "to proceed on foot to swear my three hundred men-at-arms. I have the greatest mind, I say, to proceed on foot. This is no milk-white courser you have brought me; it is the colour of mud. Am I one of a low condition, Sirrah Red Dragon, that I

should repair to meet my honest lieges on a horse that is the colour of mud ? "

" Under your ladyship's good favour," said the giant modestly, " this matter shall be rectified. I will procure a courser for you that shall be as white as the driven snow. But you cannot have for asking, good ladyship and madam, as we English say ; therefore your good Dick, an old honest fellow and a lover of sherris, must first hold a draft on the treasury of your ladyship. The which, as this old honest fellow submits duteously, the which would not be necessary were he entitled to hold the keys of your ladyship's treasury, as becomes his true merit and his gentle nurture."

" Peace, Sirrah Red Dragon," said his mistress. " We will attend you in council after a while."

The weight of her accoutrements rendered it necessary to lift the Countess Sylvia to the saddle, and there was almost a brawl among her three devoted followers before this could be arranged. The Count of Nullepart had the most address, the English barbarian had the most power, and I myself, if I may make bold to say so, had the most tenacity. Yet in the end, I believe, each one of us could claim a share in this courteous operation. The subject of this attention, although mishandled in some sort, yet retained a superb dignity and composure through it all ; and so far was she from visiting this procedure with a reproof, that it did not seem to afford her he least displeasure.

In the great patio of the castle it was a glorious

sight to see the duke's three hundred men-at-arms ranged around in a single file. The bright sun wantoned brilliantly upon their arms and breastplates, and when the Countess Sylvia rode into their midst, almost obscured in armour except for the tip of her chin, the tip of her nose, a piece of a damask cheek, and two clear and masterful eyes that glanced from under their steel canopy with the brightness of the sword she bore in her hand, they raised a cry from their honest throats. For they had seen enough to be aware that beauty and genius reigned in that proud mien. She took her place in their midst with the Count of Nullepart, Sir Richard Pendragon, and Don Miguel Jesus Maria de Sarda y Boegas beside her with drawn swords. Such a flashing and noble glance as she directed along each row could never before have met these men-at-arms.

" Sirrah Red Dragon," she said, " do you remove my headpiece that I may speak them better."

When the English giant lifted the steel canopy off her ears, and these warriors, for the most part mercenaries, beheld so much beauty and disdain, they raised another cry in her honour, for indeed there never was a more superb thing.

" Lieges and virtuous bearers of my sword," she said in her clear and spreading speech, " from this day I am your captain. I will lead ye truly through all the strait places. When the culverin bellows, the caliver barks, and the good Toledo blades flash and clang together, you will find me on my milk-white courser in the forefront of the

battle, vindicating mine own right with mine own puissance. There is a great work toward, for our cousin John, the rude Castilian prince, bids us deliver this fair castle into his covetous hand. But I do tell thee, my honest lieges, it shall not be so. I have good servants; they shall strike shrewd blows; and if the rude Castilian enters this castle, if enter he must, he shall come in chains as a captive, or there shall not be a stick or a stone or a breathing soul to give him welcome."

At this moment the English giant standing at her side raised his bonnet, adorned with a great plume, on the point of his sword, and cried out in a voice that drowned everything: "These be words, these be words! 'Tis queenly speaking! Give it tongue, friends and rascals! Let the little queen's majesty know that ye heed."

In his own great voice this mad fellow led their shouts.

"I thank you, Sirrah Red Dragon," said his mistress, "and, my honest lieges, I say to you marry and amen. That ye will make true service I see by your shining glances, but I would have you swear your fealty in the olden manner upon this good sword. For I would have you to know that my father, his lordship's grace, fell into a strange senility a twelvemonth since; there is such a distemper in his wits that he can no longer ride over his dominion. His old eye, which should be an eagle's to look proud at the sun, now watereth readily on a small occasion. There is no virtue in

his mind; his heart hath not the constancy to make him bold before an adversary. This rude Castilian prince, this wicked king, would override him as easily as he would a plain of mustard. Do you mark me, my lieges, his lordship's grace is now a figure for your tears. He is a pitiful old man, a babbler of nothings, his mind is vanity. Therefore, my lieges, he and his trusty fat man, whose ribs are larded like butter, and who is so slow in his mind as a snail, will speak ye no more. From this day I am your duke and captain, your liege lord and liege lady. I will lead ye against the Castilian host, and if we do not prevail we will fall together with our swords in our hands."

"Again, again, brothers, give it tongue!" cried the English giant, waving his plumed hat on the point of his sword, and leading the soldiers in their lusty cheers.

"Sirrah Red Dragon," said his mistress, when their cries had subsided, "I would have you cause all these good honest men defile before us, that they may be sworn upon our sword."

"Would it not be properer, your majesty," said the English giant, with a dangerous light of admiration in his eye, "if you first made them acquainted with their new captain-generalissimo, the captain of the guard and master of the horse, whose emoluments amount to the not inconsiderable sum of four thousand maravedis a month."

"You speak sooth, Sirrah Red Dragon," said the Countess Sylvia; "I will do so."

Again their respectfulness attended her while

she recommended Sir Richard Pendragon to their notice in another clear and ringing speech.

"A worshipful knight, a true warrior—"

"—And the blood of kings under his doublet, an it please your majesty. I pray you, out of regard for virtue, to let them know that."

The Countess Sylvia having condescended to inform her vassals of this fact, together with many others that the English giant interpolated into her discourse, somewhat to her impatiency, on matters touching his many and surprising deeds by sea and land, the magnificence of his talents and his ancestry, and diverse things of a like character, he was able at last to bring himself to do her bidding. And you must believe me, reader, it was one of the bravest sights in the world, to see these fierce men-at-arms, clad in bright steel, defile before the palfrey of their mistress, and swear their devotion upon the good sword she held so staunchly in her hand.

CHAPTER XVII.

OF OUR ATTENDANCE IN COUNCIL UPON A GREAT MATTER.

When at last this gallant function had come to an end, and madam's servants and retainers had been duly sworn and dismissed with good will, and even enthusiasm, upon their side, and a deal of majesty upon hers, she and her three chief officers—although for one of them, by name Don

Miguel Jesus Maria de Sarda y Boegas, neither emolument nor employ had been found up to this present—repaired from the heat of the sun to the coolness of a chamber within the castle to partake of wine and other refreshment.

"An it please you, madam, it might not come amiss," said the Count of Nullepart, "if in my capacity of master of the treasury I ventured to propose that his lordship's grace and his trusty fat man be disinterred from their present situation, which, saving the presence of your ladyship, may not be without its ignominy."

"That is well spoken, friend," said the Countess Sylvia. "Page. Where is this page of ours? What, have we no page? Come hither, page! Page, go you to the master armourer, and bid him, as he esteems his place, to send his smiths immediately to unseal the door of his lordship's grace."

"And of his trusty fat man," said the Count of Nullepart.

"And of his trusty fat man," said our mistress; "although that fat man is so foolish as a dish of butter."

"Touching my emoluments," said Sir Richard Pendragon, eating his meat almost as grossly as he did in the inn; "touching my emoluments, countess, madam, and ladyship, it has entered my mind that it would accord with my merit if in addition to my other honours I received the more signal one of mastership of your ladyship's treasury."

"Peace, Sirrah Red Dragon," said his mistress

sternly; "and do you endeavour to eat your roast pig like a Christian gentleman. Endeavour, sirrah, to imitate the courteous delicacy in his feeding of the worshipful Count of Nullepart. But peace, I say, for I would engage the officers of my household upon a great affair. This castle is in peril. I do fear that the rude Castilian and all his men will soon be knocking on the gate. Would you have me dig pits and lay snares, Sirrah Red Dragon, for you are our man of war? We have but three hundred men-at-arms, and our villainous cousin will reckon his host by the thousand."

"By my hand," said the Englishman, "this is a kettle of fish."

He fell again into the habit of stroking his chin, and it was remarkable to notice how a certain licence that was formerly to be seen in his demeanour was suddenly found in it no more. "I am fain to observe, madam," said he with his new gravity, that seemed to have worked a miracle within him, "that here is a pretty work to be done."

"Done it shall be, Sirrah Red Dragon," said the Countess Sylvia. "If we spend every drop of our blood and that of every liege that is pledged to our service, the Castilian shall not enter here; do you mark me, sirrah!"

"We must address ourselves," said the Englishman, "to providing this garrison with arms and ordnance, sack and sugar, for I am sore to believe we shall have to stand a siege. Madam, we must look to our provision without delay, if we are to throw the gauntlet down."

"It shall be done, sirrah; this Castilian shall have a welcome. How long, bethink you, sirrah, can we hold this place with our three hundred men-at-arms?"

"Two years, madam, with sufficient munitions of war. But these are to obtain."

"To-morrow," said the Countess Sylvia, who, considering that she knew no more of the world than her convent had taught her, showed a great talent for affairs, "the hinds shall drive in the cattle from our outlying farms; and arms and every sort of munition shall be purchased so long as our treasury can provide them."

"This castle has the appearance of a natural stronghold," said the Count of Nullepart, "although it is little I know of war."

"Three hundred men should give a proud battle," said I, "if they have but one half the resolution of their mistress."

"This is sooth," said the Englishman; "I think we shall be able to hold the gate against the king."

"For mine own part," said the Count of Nullepart in his winning voice, "I would suggest that in the beginning we wear a silk gown over our armour. We have nought to obtain by trying a fall with such an adversary. Ought we not, bethink you, madam, to see what first can be done by the gentleness of our address?"

"That is well said, Sir Count," said she. "He shall have gentle words in his ears. But remark me, if ever the occasion waits upon us he shall also learn that we keep a sword."

"Valiancy in action, subtlety in discourse," said the Count of Nullepart. "No kingdom could ask a choicer wisdom, madam. I drink to you as a proud but as a just and a good princess."

The sweetness of the Count of Nullepart's manner made it difficult to tell whether he toasted the lady in her beauty or the queen in her statecraft. Before Sir Richard Pendragon and myself, who viewed his action with no favourable eye, could decide whether such a behaviour was justified at a moment so grave, for madam in spite of her dignity had not thought fit to reprove him for it, there came a grievous interruption to our counsels and the harmony of our board.

His lordship's grace, with his trusty fat man at his heels, bore down upon us.

"Ods myself," he whined, shaking his fist, "if I do not put her in a dungeon for this I am unfit to wear hose. Soh! there we have you, little snake, surrounded by your conspirators. Luiz—Luiz; where are you, Luiz? Go, fetch the guard. These three rogues shall be broke on the wheel, and then they shall hang on the gate; and madam herself shall dwell in a dungeon for an hundred days."

"My lord," said his daughter calmly, "do not interfere with the business of the state."

"Business of the state!" cried the duke. "I would have you to know, madam, that I am the business of the state. Ods myself! if I had my sword here I would spill some blood."

In the violence of his anger the duke became so weak and incoherent that at last he fell to weeping

like a child. And as he was thus engaged, and wiping his eyes on the sleeve of his rich silk doublet, Don Luiz had the misfortune to appear with twelve soldiers of the guard.

"Sirrah Red Dragon," said the Countess Sylvia, turning to the English giant with a most masterful insolence, "as you value the command of my good lieges, I would have you see to it that they take that fat fellow, who is so beastly in his appearance that I hardly dare to give him a name, and do you have him placed in a strait jerkin. And do you see to it that he hath neither sack nor sugar, neither grease nor butter, nor pig, nor flesh of any kind, nor German forcemeat, nor any article of victual whatsoever that is likely in any degree to inflame his bulk."

"I obey your command, madam and ladyship. I kneel at your feet," said the English giant, making a mighty flourish. The next moment the unfortunate Don Luiz was marched forth, protesting violently, while the old duke, at the sight of this grievous affront to his gentleman-usher, fell to gnashing his teeth one moment and shedding tears the next.

"Where is my authority?" he cried out. "Am I without authority behind mine own door? Oh, this is grievous, this is grievous! I have a she-wolf for a daughter and she hath filled my old years with sorrow. Is there no manhood in Spain? Will none protect a parent from the machinations of a she-wolf? Do my goodly life and my clement nature go for nought? Is there no consideration for the aged, who are blind of eye, who are halt of their gait, who are smitten with ague and loss of their appetites?

Is there no virtue in the whole of this wicked and ungracious world? Oh me, misery! I could weep till my poor soul was drowned in a flood of tears."

"If your lordship's grace will not bawl like an old bull under the moon," said the little countess ruthlessly, "I will give you the leg of an ortolan. These are great matters we are pledged to consider, and if your lordship's grace, which mops and mows like an old grey bear that hath no teeth to tear its dinner, intrudes upon our deliberations so unseasonably, we should do better to play at mumchance or to bite our thumbs. Go into a corner and eat a fowl, and leave this assembly to thwart the machinations of the rude Castilian."

"Ay di me!" said the duke, "give me a wing then! This is a nice old age to be so maltreated. Is there no virtue in the whole of the world! Ay di me! I am the most misused parent in Spain. Give me a wing, then, proud hulks, give me a wing; and ods my good heart, I will never be a parent again."

His lordship's grace being presently comforted with the carcass of an ortolan, sat himself down on a stool in a corner of the apartment and began to devour it fiercely. But hardly had the council resumed its deliberations, when Sir Richard Pendragon returned wearing a mien of high authority, and informed his mistress that a messenger was at the gate bearing a cartel from the Castilian.

"Do you admit him, Sirrah Red Dragon," said she. "Let him be brought to our presence. We will hold speech with him."

As the English giant went on his errand, the Count of Nullepart bent across the council board, and whispered in the ear of the Countess Sylvia, "Courteously, courteously, an it like your ladyship. Will madam deign to remember that many a deep wound hath been abated by a fair expression?"

"Peace, friend," said the Countess Sylvia with a queenly look. "My words are as I want them. I speak this Castilian in what sort I choose; and I would have him to know that if I speak him soft he shall yet feel my dagger. I have three hundred men of valiance, and I care not if the rude Castilian were the King of the Russ."

Surely a glance so flashing and a bearing of such high disdain never shone about a mortal creature as those that enhanced this noble thing, as she sat as staunch as an arrow before the council board, awaiting the delivery of the cartel from the most powerful prince in Spain.

CHAPTER XVIII.

OF THE AMBASSADOR OF THE RUDE CASTILIAN PRINCE.

When the ambassador came into the room, the duke rose from his stool, and having carefully and politely removed the grease from the fingers of his right hand, held out his hand for the cartel in an imperious manner.

"Señor Ambassador," said he, with the inimitable air which requires a grandee of I know not how many quarterings to support, "I understand you to come from our nephew of Castile. I will heed this, his mandate, carefully."

Upon receiving the parchment sealed massively in wax he removed the grease from the fingers of his left hand and proceeded with patient dignity to peruse the challenge.

In the meantime, the Countess Sylvia, seated at the board in the midst of her council, was in a fury.

"Look at that old man!" she cried out. "Look at his thumbs! Why does he use them upon the missive of the Castilian? Look, Sirrah Red Dragon, he is reading it upside down!"

"Silence there at the top of the table," said the duke, with the grandeur of one who has wielded an unquestioned authority for threescore years, yet having vainly endeavoured to peruse the document in the manner his daughter had indicated. "Do you read it to us, good plenipotentiary. Silence there, I say! If you do not close your trap, you hulks, I will have you flogged with severity. Silence, I say again! Ods nig and nog! was ever one who is old and a parent beset with so much incivility!"

While the ambassador, a dark man in a dusty riding suit of Cordovan leather, and accompanied by a retinue of three as dusty as himself, proceeded to read the terms of the cartel aloud to the duke, his lordship's grace fell again to devouring the ortolan. By the time the messenger had reached the part in which the Castilian bade his uncle

deliver up his castle hard by the city of Toledo, and bade him retire to his lesser manor in the province of Leon, the old man began to babble and whimper, and finally to break into tears.

"Look at him! look at him!" cried the Countess Sylvia. "If your lordship's grace would wipe your old red eyes on your cuff, and eat your fowl like a Christian, and cease to roar like a horse as it walks up a hill, I and my good counsellors might frame a fitting answer to the Castilian."

"Ods myself!" snuffled his lordship's grace, "sooner than I will be a parent again I will cut my throat."

With a proud voice the Lady Sylvia bade the envoy of the Castilian come up to the high table and present the cartel to her. She received it with every mark of disgust; and, indeed, the fingers of his lordship's grace had robbed it of that fair appearance it may have formerly enjoyed. But when she came to read this document her mood changed to one of flaming anger, since the manner of the Castilian's epistle was indeed of the sort to fret a lofty spirit.

"'Too long, good my uncle Roldan, hast thou held thy demesne'"—the little countess read particular passages aloud with unutterable scorn. "'Thy situation above the great city of Toledo, the first of our realm, cannot be borne. Yourself is a good and honest prince, good my uncle Roldan, but your grace hath the whole of your worthy manor of Aldoleda in which to inhabit your excellent old age. Your noble mountain fortress is necessary to our design, for our kingdom must be so strong that we

fear no enemies. We would have you deliver this fortress, together with two hundred men-at-arms, unto us within the space of twenty days; and by these presents we do engage not to molest your grace and good my uncle Roldan in your worthy manor of Aldoleda, in which fair place your honourable old age will not lack security."

Verily I think there never was such an imperious anger as that of the Countess Sylvia as slowly she deciphered the contents of this pronunciamento with the aid of myself and the Count of Nullepart. She tore the missive down the middle and flung it on the ground.

"Envoy," she said, "get you gone as you value your neck, and do you inform our cousin Castile that I spurn him as I would a mad wolf."

"Softly, softly," whispered the Count of Nullepart to his mistress. "I pray you, madam, not to forget your statecraft in this affront to your ambition."

"Peace, sirrah!" said the Countess Sylvia. "If the envoy doth not withdraw I will have him impaled."

The emissary of the king bowed low.

"Madam," he said, "my business, under your favour, is with his grace the Duke of Montesina."

"There is no Duke of Montesina; his lordship's grace was deposed at twelve o'clock this day. Myself am the master and the mistress here."

"She speaks sooth, Master Envoy," said Sir Richard Pendragon. "If the gracious countess so much as frowns since this morning, every stick

and stone within these walls doth fall into a most violent trembling."

"My business is with his grace the Duke of Montesina," said the envoy staunchly.

"Do I not tell thee his lordship's grace is deposed?" said the Countess Sylvia. "He is as weak in his mind as a seamew."

"And I venture, Master Envoy," said I, with a touch of our famous northern penetration, "to suggest that the king your master is aware of this calamity."

"That is nothing to the case, sir," said the envoy, waiving this inconvenient suggestion aside. "My business is with your master the duke, and I would fain transact it."

"There is no duke, do I not tell thee, stupid one!" said the Countess Sylvia. "Do I not say he is deposed?"

"Deposed!" cried his lordship's grace, hearing the words of his daughter and understanding them, for although his wits were deranged they were susceptible of strong flashes of reason. "Deposed! Who speaks thus? Who dares say that there is no duke? I would have you to know, Master Ambassador, and all the world to know it also, that there is a duke, and he is a duke of vim and valiance. Deposed! Ods myself! these are the words of a wicked hulks. As I am a parent, Master Ambassador, I have the most ingrateful daughter in Spain."

"Envoy," said the Countess Sylvia, "I pray you do not heed that old man. He is as immoderate

in his motions as a frog in a moist afternoon. His wits are weak; there is a cloud in his mind; he babbles foolishly."

"Luiz!" cried the duke—"where's my good Luiz? Where art thou, Luiz? Fetch the guard, good gossip, and as I am a parent, this ingrateful hulks shall go to the house of correction."

"Do not heed him, envoy," said her ladyship. "This old man is forwandered in his mind like a bat in the daylight. Speak him fair, but heed him not. He is a babbler."

"Come to me, Luiz—come to me!" cried the duke, brandishing the carcass of the ortolan. "Why do you not come to me, good fat man? Will you see me sounced by the tongue of a jade? Deposed, says she! I babble foolishly! Come to me, Luiz, as thou art a good Christian man, and I will have her scourged."

There could never have been a more whimsical sight since the world set up in business than the distraction of the King of Castile's ambassador, himself a man of bearing and nobility, standing in the midst of his astonished retinue, as he gazed from one to the other of those who addressed him. Yet it was presently borne in upon him by the outrageous speaking of the poor old duke, and the vacancy of his eyes, that all his politics, in whatever they might consist, were like to be overridden by the imperious will that had assumed the reins of governance. Therefore, after awhile, he adopted the only wise and possible course, which was to accept the little countess as the principal

in this affair. And in spite of all that we, her counsellors, could do to impose some check upon her speech—for the Castilian had the name of being as proud a prince as there was on the earth—she refused to soften her words, and insisted that the envoy should bear them to his master.

"And further, Don Jose de Fermosilla," said she, "I would have you bid Castile, our cousin, assemble all his hosts and bring them hither, and they shall not lack for a welcome. They shall receive good play of sword and pike, halberd and musket, and every conceivable engine of belligerency. Are we mud, Don Jose de Fermosilla—are we mud, I say, myself and his lordship's grace (myself having all the grace of his lordship since a little before noon this day)—are we mud, sirrah, that this Castilian speaks us unmannerly? By my sooth, Don Jose, this is a rude prince; but as there is a nerve in our right hand—do you mark me, sirrah?—upon a day his sauciness shall not go unvisited."

"O statecraft! O statecraft!" said the Count of Nullepart in a low voice and smiling softly.

At these words of the Lady Sylvia, which had been uttered with every mark of disdain, the bearer of the cartel drew himself up with a proud mien, and said with much haughtiness on his own part,—

"Madam, as you are young and a woman, I would humbly propose, although it is no part of my province to propose it, that you weigh your words again in the scale before you publish them to the King's majesty. It would be a pitiful matter

if in the inclemency of his temper he harried his lordship's dominion and razed both his castles to the earth. For I would have you to know, madam, that there is no prince in all Christendom to whom such words would come more amiss. He is so instant in his nature that on shorter terms than these he would put the whole of this garrison to the sword."

"He is welcome to do this, Don Jose," said our mistress fearlessly, in spite of the fact that the Count of Nullepart was plucking at the sleeve of her robe, "if he is able."

"He does not stand without ability, madam, if the truth must be spoken," said Don Jose. "He can come before your gates in a fortnight with five thousand men, with artillery and engines of the latest capacity."

"He shall be welcome, sirrah."

"You, madam," said Don Jose scornfully, "have three hundred soldiers in your service, as I am informed. Whoever heard such proud words, madam, upon so much insufficiency?"

"Harkee, Don Jose," said the little countess menacingly, "I would not have you give too free an expression to your private ideas, for there are dungeons under this castle which on a day have held your betters."

"So I believe, madam," said Don Jose. "But I stand in the light of one who would come between a woman and her inclination. Yet I would ask you to believe, madam, that in this matter I am your sincere well-wisher."

"We none of us doubt that, sir," said the Count of Nullepart in his sweetest accent, and looking upon the messenger with his charming melancholy. "And if, sir, you will heed madam's youth rather than her speaking, you will be her good servant. If you will have the goodness to inform the King your master that his cartel has been received with all consideration and honourable courtesy; that his grace the Duke of Montesina will bestow all possible attention upon it during the interregnum of twenty days which his Majesty has nominated with so much kindness; and that any decision at which his grace may arrive shall be delivered to the King your master by another hand, all within this castle shall ever be yours in all humility."

"Yes, that is right speaking," said Sir Richard Pendragon, who had almost assumed the demeanour of a cardinal; "that is a ripe wisdom and a courteous maturity."

"You speak well, sir," said Don Jose de Fermosilla, making a low bow. "And I convey that message to the King, my master."

"Perhaps it were not amiss, Sir Count," said I, "if you put your good words in writing. Were it not well to call a scrivener?"

"Truly," said the ambassador, "that would indeed be well."

The Countess Sylvia, however, was furiously angry, but those three councillors who strove humbly to serve her attended her humours with the highest patience. Yet, for all their devices, they were not able entirely to succeed, for as soon as the scrivener

was come into the room she bade him leave her presence on the pain of death.

In such circumstances our natural ally was the duke. But so completely had his lordship's grace been overborne by the heats and violences of the day, that having picked his ortolan, he had duly fallen asleep on his stool in the middle of the negotiations. Therefore it remained for us, her councillors, to soften the affront that was like to be put by our mistress upon the Castilian. Yet in the end we could do no better than put our faith in the humanity and discretion of Don Jose de Fermosilla to represent the attitude of madam with a becoming leniency. For again and yet again did she announce her determination to flout her insolent cousin. And presently matters were brought to such a pass that it was only the highly diplomatic conduct of Sir Richard Pendragon in feigning utter deafness when she called on him in peremptory tones to summon the guard to have the envoy and the Count of Nullepart himself placed in a dungeon for seeking to outface her, that made it possible to conclude the matter at all.

In the end Don Jose took his departure with a promise to the Count of Nullepart, Sir Richard Pendragon, and myself that he would represent this matter to the King his master in a spirit of forbearance. In spite of that, I think none of us reposed much faith in his assurances, which, in the face of madam's arrogance, were given by no means heartily. Indeed, as he took his leave his eyes were furtive and lowering, and in his mien was neither kindness

nor friendship. As for our mistress, surely there never was so much queenly insolence as when the ambassador made to withdraw.

"We take no leave of you, Don Jose de Fermosilla," said she. "We make you and your master no compliments. You have incurred our highest displeasure."

Don Jose de Fermosilla bowed stiffly and with his retinue passed out at the door.

"Call him again!" cried the Countess Sylvia to those who were in attendance.

Don Jose returned, yet there was no abatement of his dark looks.

"I would have you proceed backwards out of our presence, Don Jose de Fermosilla," said madam insolently. "And do you inform our cousin that it is nothing to our pleasure that we must keep a school of manners for his emissaries."

Don Jose de Fermosilla withdrew in the desired manner, biting at his lips with chagrin.

CHAPTER XIX.

OF MADAM'S EMBASSY TO HER NEPHEW FRANCE.

When the audience had terminated in this unfortunate manner, madam's three councillors sat long together in anxious intercourse.

"If I comprehend the disposition of man," said the Count of Nullepart gloomily, "and more particu-

larly the temper of princes, the puissant Castilian will be before our gates in twenty days."

"God speed his journeying, Sir Count," said madam, the wilful cause of our foreboding. "The sooner Castile affronts our gate the sooner shall he learn our steel."

"We have but three hundred men-at-arms, madam," said the Count of Nullepart.

"They shall bear themselves as thirty thousand," said our mistress.

Madam's three councillors exchanged glances with one another. They spoke aside.

"The most puissant prince in Spain, and we have but three hundred men-at-arms with which to deny him," said the Count of Nullepart.

Sir Richard Pendragon teased his short chin beard.

"I' facks," said he, "they may be good men all and we three as a legion, but an elderly soldado who has drawn his point on an hundred fields in Europe and Asia Minor likes at least the same number of chins under the same number of noses as his adversary."

"Are ye fearful, Sirrah Red Dragon?" said the Countess Syliva, regarding her favourite officer with disdain.

"Not fearful at all, good your ladyship," said the English giant, "not fearful at all, but yet addicted to the process of thought, like all deep minds of my nation." Again the mighty warrior teased his short chin beard.

"We need an army," said I, "and yet three hundred soldiers is the whole of our garrison."

"And this is a fair manor," said the Englishman, "and Richard Pendragon, knight, has a crow to pluck with the Castilian."

This speech caused the Lady Sylvia to train the glance of a hawk upon the Englishman.

"My good Sirrah Red Dragon," said she, "by the same token I am inclined to remember that our nephew France hath also a crow to pluck with the Castilian."

At these words the Count of Nullepart rose from the council board with some little perturbation.

"Your nephew France, madam," he said. "Your nephew France."

Madam perused the Count of Nullepart's countenance with a surprised inquiry.

"Sir Count," said she, "I mentioned my nephew France. Have you the acquaintance of France, our worthy nephew?"

"Yes, madam," said the Count of Nullepart with something of embarrassment, "that is, I mean no—that is, I mean—"

"What is the substance of your meaning, Sir Count?" said madam with petulance.

"It has no substance, madam," said the Count of Nullepart.

The Count of Nullepart resumed his place at the council board with an assumption of composure.

Sir Richard Pendragon took up the thread of the discourse.

"By my hand," said he, "this is very like a providence, to use a favourite idiom of Ferdinando the Ninth, a friend of my youth and hereditary

sovereign of the Russ. If, madam, your nephew France—and craving your forgiveness, my dear soul, Richard Pendragon, honest fellow, had not guessed that, like himself, your ladyship's grace had all these well placed relations—if, madam, as you say, your nephew France—how pleasantly, to be sure, the name trips off the tongue of one who hath the blood of kings under his doublet!—in fact, madam, in the circumstances might I not say *our* nephew France?—if, madam, as I say, *our* nephew France has a crow to pluck with the Castilian, is not this the very season in which to begin the pulling of feathers?"

"I offer you no contradiction, Sirrah Red Dragon," said the Countess Sylvia with her bearing of beautiful disdain, and with I know not how many generations of statecraft in her glance.

The English giant caused the board to groan with a blow from his great hand.

"By this hand!" he said, "your mind is a good one, madam. You are young and a female and you live in Spain, but you have a good mind. It is, I suppose, that even in Spain the blood of kings confers an especial nobility. Richard Pendragon, knight of Great Britain, of the Welsh Marches and the Island of Manx, is in accordance with you. The hour strikes; your nephew France must pluck his crow with the Castilian."

"Sir Richard Pendragon," said the Count of Nullepart, "your speaking is choice, yet what if by a strange mischance the good France hath not heard the striking of the hour?"

Madam silenced the Count of Nullepart with her imperious glance.

"We will send an embassy," said she. "This very day we will send an embassy to Paris."

This high resolution of madam's was received with instant favour by her councillors. Sir Richard Pendragon acclaimed it as the flower of wisdom; the Count of Nullepart gave it the accomplished and mature sanction of one who had moved much in the world; while I, who in years and merit was not the peer of these gentlemen, yet gave it the approbation of blood as honourable as any to be found in Spain.

A scrivener was called immediately to set in writing the proposal of the Countess Sylvia to her nephew France. First assuring her nephew of her personal affection for him, and a great interest in the prosperity of his affairs (a suggestion of the Count of Nullepart, who seemed highly versed in these documents), she proceeded in the language of diplomacy, in which the count continued to discover no little skill, to ask the immediate aid of four thousand men-at-arms in order that she might defend her heritage from a common enemy.

When this document was duly drawn up in folio, and the Count of Nullepart read aloud in his beautiful voice the terms which had been choicely expressed, and madam, with the air of one who held an empire within the palm of her small right hand, appended her signature with great difficulty, after twice consulting the scrivener as to the fashion of spelling her baptismal name, that it might accord with the

practice of the most learned and best found minds of the age—" Because," as she said, " if we use an ' i ' when a ' y ' is considered more modish, our nephew may believe we are more rustic here at Montesina than they are at Paris "—after this had been accomplished and the great ducal seal had been appended, a controversy arose among her ministers as to whose should be the honour of conveying it to its destination.

Madam herself was disposed to entrust it to the charge of the Count of Nullepart, since the grace of his appearance and the charm of his address and his knowledge of the conduct of high diplomacy seemed to mark him out for a mission of this nature. Yet no sooner had our mistress shown a disposition to give this sanction to the Count of Nullepart than Sir Richard Pendragon took umbrage.

" Good countess and ladyship," said he, " by the body of God ! I would not have you consider Richard Pendragon froward or lacking in his devoirs to one who deserves all homage. But can you have forgotten, madam, that the blood of kings flows under the doublet of that high-minded and courteous knight, of that gentle-nurtured and civil-tongued emblem of English chivalry, who has moved in court circles since his natal hour ? "

" Your merit is ever before us, Sirrah Red Dragon," said the Countess Sylvia, who still permitted the English giant to stand in high favour. " Your claims are honourable, but the worshipful Count of Nullepart has natural parts."

Sir Richard Pendragon turned down his lip with the look of a child that is petulant.

"By your leave, noble countess," he said, "Richard Pendragon claims precedence in this high business by right of consanguinity. His royal nature, the lineal strain of Uthyr, cannot suffer it that Mounseer Nullepart, who is passing honest and a good fellow, shall take precedence of him at the court of France."

Upon this speech of the Englishman, the Count of Nullepart was moved to smile in a fashion so subtle that he was fain to cover his face with his hand, as if to withhold its meaning.

"Not for the world, Sir Richard," he said, with his eyes full of laughter—"nay, not for a thousand worlds would I take precedence of you at the court of France."

As he spoke he was overwhelmed by a sudden and uncontrollable mirth.

"Why do you indulge, Sir Count, in this immoderation?" said madam curiously.

"The court of France is such an uncommonly dull place, madam," said the Count of Nullepart, with the mirth still in his eyes.

"Do you forget, Sir Count," said madam haughtily, "that France is our nephew?"

"I do not forget it, madam," said the Count of Nullepart; "I only marvel the more that such an aunt should have such a nephew."

Again the Count of Nullepart began to laugh immoderately, and it was plain by the demeanour of our mistress that she must have reproved his behaviour had she not been altogether disarmed by his words.

It was here, as became a high-born caballero of my nation, that I advanced my own claims to this service, however modest they might appear. After all, my two worthy coadjutors, whatever their honour and their merit, were no more than foreigners, and this was the business of Spain.

"Under your favour, madam," said I, "I am a kinsman of the Sardas y Boegas, whose boast it hath been since the time of Alban II. that they have served a prince of Spain. By right of natural affinity I claim to serve your grace."

"You, brother," said the English giant, breaking into a great roar, "you claim to serve her grace! Why, brother, you will best serve the grace of her ladyship by holding her trencher when she eats her nuncheon."

Madam, however, inclined a courteous ear.

"And further, noble countess," said I, under the encouragement of her regard, "this embassy is like to be one of peril. The road to France is dangerous, and much of it is the dominion of an enemy."

"Why, you mad Iberian varlet," cried the Englishman, "do you deny the address of a right Pendragon to outface the dangers of the way?"

"Good Sir Richard Pendragon," I replied, "I do not question your address. It is because it is so great that I would not expose it to the accidents of travel. Madam never was in need of such notable service; you are her most notable servant; therefore I would humbly submit that you continue to sit with her in council, and devise a proper

plan of war, while one who is less in mother-wit and masterful consideration embraces the perils of the road."

Sir Richard Pendragon was well pleased with words so caressing to his self-esteem.

"This," said he, "is good speaking for a Spaniard; and as I am a true man and a man addicted to high policy, I commend you, Don Miguel, for you have spoken well. But this embassy to the good France is an affair of moment. It touches one of the first princes of his age; and as he is one of the few at present living in Europe and Asia that one who hath grown old in the love of virtue hath not met, that true mind and honest mettle claims to conduct these negotiations by right of consanguinity."

I know not how long we sat in council, each advancing his several claims to serve our mistress in this particular; and she, good soul and very woman, conferred no harmony upon our board. It pleased her well that her three servants should display this zeal to make trial of their merit; and though her mien declared that she was fain to consider each to be worthy, yet which of her sex will be content with one when three contend to do her service?

And so, when we were weary with our contention, and that momentous day began to wane, we reconciled our rivalry in the only natural and possible manner. As not one of us would yield his claims, and as each was equally worthy in his own opinion, and equally eligible in that of our mistress, it was proposed by the Count of Nullepart, in that agreeable fashion that none knew how to resist, that

the three of us should brave the perils of the road together. And at last, reluctantly, and each with a glance at the other, we gave our assent; whereupon madam, without any reluctance at all, gave hers with the gravest dignity.

Even when we had conducted our negotiations to this issue, there was one other matter to come between us and harmony. To whom was the folio to be entrusted? In this, however, Sir Richard Pendragon showed a measure of arbitrariness that was only to be deplored. He took the signed and sealed document from off the council board, saying that, "by right of consanguinity," he claimed the prerogative of presenting it to the good France; and that "if either Mounseer or little Don What-did-he-call-himself questioned that right, let him be good enough to pluck these letters of marque from a doublet that enclosed the blood of kings."

CHAPTER XX.

OF OUR ROAD TO PARIS.

THE sun had scarce begun to creep from behind his white curtain when, on the following day, madam's three ministers set forth on their embassy. The road to Paris was more than an hundred leagues. The first part of it lay through the very heart of Castile; much of it was difficult and beset with peril for the traveller, and particularly for those upon such a service as ours. Yet upon this beautiful morning

of midsummer, as we rode forth from the castle down the steep winding track, these jealous servants of a noble mistress gave not a thought to the dangers that might befall.

As we took the road our chief concern was to come to King Louis at Paris with all expedition, and to return again with all the speed possible in the company of an armed host, that the designs of the Castilian might be thwarted. With madam's high courage and a tolerable address on the part of her garrison, her fastness might be held against an enemy until our return. Yet we felt that every hour was of price, and that there was not one to lose.

Judge, then, of our concern when upon coming into Toledo, Sir Richard Pendragon stayed his horse at that fonda we had come to know so well. He declared that, "Castilian or no Castilian, he must break his fast," and acquire a store of victual to bear with him during the day. "For," as he declared, "Spain was a most cursed country, and unless you had been bred to eat sand and brown dust, you were like to go short at your meals in the course of a long excursion."

The Englishman declined to be moved by our prayers to hurry his campaign at the inn table. "The belly is a proud jade," he said, "and apt to take affront at a small thing. It was through an intemperate haste at his meals that one of the foremost among my ancestors was fain to renounce the eating of roast pig, that most delectable of cates, at the age of one-and-thirty."

Sir Richard Pendragon having at last, as he

expressed it. " coaxed the rude jade into a humour of some civility," made to mount his tall horse which stood solemnly munching corn before the inn door. But as he did so there arose an altercation with the innkeeper, for, following his usual practice, the Englishman showed no disposition to pay his score. However, as we moved off, the Count of Nullepart threw a piece of money to the astonished and complaining host.

Nevertheless we had scarcely gone the distance of a single street when Sir Richard Pendragon again dismounted. In one of the bazaars which abound in this city he purchased a handsome cloak edged with fur, which put the tattered garment he was wearing to the blush. His bonnet also received a new white feather for its adornment. " It was not seemly," he said, " that one of his lineage should come before the good France like a guy in a field of young beans, lest France, who was a good fellow, should consider him to be one of the Spanish nobility."

Upon these loose words I felt my hand stray to the hilt of my sword. And although our situation was one of great instancy, and my incapacity to cope with the Englishman's skill in this weapon was notorious, we must have crossed blades in the public street had not the peace been indebted to the notable behaviour of the worshipful Count of Nullepart. His apologies for this rude foreigner were so delicate that I swallowed my choler in what sort I might; and to such a point did the Count of Nullepart carry his courtesy that he even brought the Englishman to say that his reference to the Span-

ish nobility " was only his humour, which, as was the case with his nation, was apt to lead him into all kinds of fantasy; although foreign peoples, who lived in dark places, and rubbed but seldom against enlightened minds, could never addict themselves to this English pleasantry. Y'are solemn rogues, you continentals," he concluded. " I don't wonder you require so much holy water and so many masses for your souls."

As we came through the market-place there were hens and turkeys exposed for sale in the open bazaars. To the astonishment of those who sold these wares, Sir Richard Pendragon lifted a number of them on to his saddle on the point of his sword, saying " that, in his opinion, although doubtless it was his English whimsicality, their flavour, if roasted gently over a sea-coal fire, compared not unfavourably with the finest Spanish sand and the fattest Spanish flies."

The Count of Nullepart and myself being of this mind also, our companion left to us the task of appeasing those who had thus been ravished of their wares. Yet even to us he addressed a remonstrance. " Is it good silver money you are giving these poor souls? " he said. " I daresay it is the continental custom, but it marks an essential difference between the nations of the earth. We quick-moving islanders are more peremptory. You continentals ask a 'by your leave,' and live by the power of the purse; we English all the world over claim our own where we find it."

In this, at least, I think Sir Richard Pendragon

must have had a just appreciation of his countrymen. For all the long leagues we rode with him upon our embassy it was never once our hap to find him with his hand within his poke.

When we had come out of Toledo, and had got fairly upon the narrow winding tracks which traversed the great wilderness that was spread before us, Sir Richard Pendragon began to show a great concern for robbers. His eyes were continually casting about the horizon. No bush, no rock, no tree escaped his dark suspicion; his hand was upon the hilt of his sword a hundred times a day. At every turn of the road he expected to see a robber; and, indeed, as the day wore on without any sort of encounter, it seemed to be a grief to him that robbers were so few. But if we came upon any chance wayfarers, to judge by the haste which they made to get clear of our path, I should say that this opinion was not general.

"By my soul," said Sir Richard Pendragon, as three honest, grey-bearded merchants upon comely asses scurried away up a steep mountain path, "these Spaniardoes are the poorest spirited people upon the face of the earth. If I had not had a good mother, and she had not had a good son, I might have unloaded those fish-blooded burgesses so easily as I drink sherris."

Whereupon Sir Richard Pendragon sighed profoundly.

We made many leagues that first day of our journey, although we rested at noon in a small hamlet from the heat of the sun. It may have

been that we had entered upon our adventure not too propitiously, and that the humours of the Englishman made but an odd sort of companionship—notwithstanding a liberal rebate for the qualities of kings' blood—for one who boasted the sangre azul of a true hidalgo; yet the wisdom and politeness of the humane and ever-delightful Count of Nullepart kept us all three to the road, and brought us in a state of toleration one of another to a wayside venta at the end of the long day.

In this rustic place we enjoyed a good supper and a peaceful night's repose. We had journeyed long that day, and seldom have I known an honest sleep taste more delicious. But by now we were well in the King of Castile's country, and the next morning, as we took our way, the vigilance of the Englishman grew double. The Count of Nullepart and myself were tolerably easy that none would guess our mission. Not so Sir Richard Pendragon. He declared his experience of Castile to be such that walls had ears, blind men saw, and dead men told tales.

Indeed, it was clear from the lively concern that Sir Richard displayed that his former passages with the King of Castile had not been pleasant ones. Precisely what they were we could not learn from him who had suffered them, yet that they had been grievous and considerable we had the authority of his demeanour.

On the second day, as we came into the road to Madrid, we saw high up in the distant hills one of the noblest castles of this infamous king. At the

sight of it, with the westering sun touching the embowery of its trees with gold, Sir Richard Pendragon reined in his horse, took off his hat, and spat on the earth; and then, in what must have been the roundest London English, for it sounded very rude and barbarous, he cursed the King of Castile, he cursed his mother and his female relations, even unto his wet nurse and his most distant kinsfolk.

"The first trick is yours, Spanish John," he said. "I allow it; I admit it; my early nurture has been too gentle to cope with low deceit. But harkee, John Spaniard, the next trick will go to t'other player, or my gracious sire was not the King of England."

"Do I gather, most worthy Sir Richard Pendragon," said the Count of Nullepart in a melodious voice, "that your former passages with King John of Castile have been of a grievous character?"

"Yes, good mounseer," said Sir Richard Pendragon, giving his tall horse such a kick in the ribs as astonished that extraordinary quadruped; "you may gather it. If my good mind walks not abroad in bad dreams, I have been mishandled, mounseer, I have been mishandled. And let me tell thee, good mounseer, English Dick hath never been mishandled previously, except once at the instance of virtue, which was upon the knee of the sainted lady who is now in heaven."

As we pursued our way towards the capital of the King's dominion, a profound silence overtook the Englishman. His dark and lowering looks were the palpable fruit of a former bitterness;

and as we came into Madrid at nightfall, the numerous soldiers we passed in the streets wearing the Castilian s livery seemed to inflame his humour. Indeed, as we entered the first venta we came to within the gates of the city, and as we were disposing our horses in comfort for the night, he was moved to say that "if his humour did not lift after supper, he was minded to go out in the streets and cut a few throats, as the sight of so many jackbooted rascals twirling their moustachios was as sore to him as the presence of holy water was to the Author of Deceit."

The stabling of this venta was divided from the great kitchen of the inn by a short arched passage-way. Upon crossing this we found to our good pleasure that the hearth was entirely at our disposal, as there was no other company in the inn. Over the fire was suspended a cauldron, and this we regarded with favour. After we had supped worthily, we prepared ourselves for the repose we so much desired; but it was written that there should be no sleep for us that night.

Scarce had we disposed ourselves about the chimney-place for the slumber for which we yearned, when the first of the passages that were to ensue came upon us. A number of soldiers wearing the livery of the King came into the inn kitchen, bawling for wine and victual. These men, in their high boots and long cloaks and great hats, and with their long moustachios, were extremely formidable to look upon; and the Count of Nullepart and myself, conscious as we were of the strange mood of

our companion, no sooner beheld these fellows than we regretted their intrusion exceedingly.

Sir Richard Pendragon, as became an old campaigner, had his eyes already sealed in slumber, and was beginning to snore loudly as he reclined with his enormous legs stretched out to the hearth, when these soldiers entered so unseasonably. As they came swaggering up to the cooking-pot, abusing the landlord loudly that no food was ready, one of them had the misfortune to trip over the Englishman's far-extended limbs. As he measured his length he swore a horrid oath in rude Spanish.

The Englishman gave a grunt and opened his eyes sleepily, and seeing the soldier sprawling on all fours, he said to the innkeeper, who was about to add a fowl to the pot, "Landlord, ye should not admit bears and dromedaries and beasts with four feet among the nobility. The nobility do not like it."

The Englishman's insolent tone was heard by the comrades of the fallen one, who numbered eight or nine. They looked at him as though they could not believe what their ears had told them, and then their hands flew to the hilts of their swords. By this, however, the fallen one had risen to his feet. He pulled his moustachios and rolled his eyes with fury.

"By the devil's life!" he cried, "you foreign dog, I will cut out your liver!"

And as he spoke he drew his sword with a flourish.

CHAPTER XXI.

OF OUR FIRST PASSAGES WITH THE CASTILIAN.

KNOWING the temper of our companion towards all of this complexion, we expected no less of him than that he would spring to his feet at once and have at this ruffler. But, to our surprise, he remained just as he was, not stirring a hand, yet abating his speech into a curious kind of softness, which seemed to me, who knew his prowess, to render him the more formidable.

"Do you hear, you Bavarian dog?" the infuriated soldier cried in his ear as he brandished his sword. "I say I will cut off your head!"

The Englishman yawned a little, and then said in a tone of such humility as to render it surprising, "May I ask your excellency to accord English Dickon a brief space for his prayers? His was a nice mother, and she had a nice son, and her last charge to her first-born was, 'Richard, when Heaven requires you, let a life of integrity be your passport to the Holy Stool.'"

The soldiers seemed inclined to accept this whimsical mildness for pusillanimity.

"By the devil's life," said the soldier, whose valour appeared to wax higher before the Englishman's forbearance, "you shall have a minute for your orisons, you red-coloured, beer-swilling snuffler!"

"No more?" said the English giant. "Consider it, your excellency—a minute is a little space. There will be no time for a priest. And then the Host ought to be sent for."

"Not an instant more, by the devil's life!" cried the furious soldier.

"Alack!" said Sir Richard Pendragon, "I would have liked the clergy, but I suppose it is not to be. Yet it will be a sad meeting in heaven, all the same, with my sainted dam."

The soldier cast a reflection upon the mother of Sir Richard Pendragon that no man of my nation would have found possible to overpass. Instead of heeding it, however, the English giant called to the innkeeper, "Landlord, I would have you bring me a cup of sherris in order that I may perish gracefully."

Here it was, however, before the landlord was able to obey this order, or the Castilian bravo had the opportunity to lay his own design into execution, that the affair took a new turn. At this moment another soldier, whose moustachios were fiercer and whose plume was longer than those of any of his comrades, and who, to judge by the deference that was paid him, appeared to be their captain, entered the inn. Swearing an oath, he strode through the angry group, and in the fashion of one who was preparing to devour us, approached us three who sat peacefully about the hearth.

"What is this?" he cried. "Who are these that dare to wear cloaks and sit by the fire in the presence of the King's soldiers?"

"These are Bavarian brawlers, gracious Don Nicholas," said a greybeard among the soldiers.

"Bavarian brawlers, are they?" said Don Nicholas. "By Our Lady, they shall be taken to the King's dungeon. At them and seize them and take them away!"

At this command the soldiers made as if they would lay hands upon us; and as the Count of Nullepart seemed little inclined to deny them, and Sir Richard Pendragon appeared to have grown so sleepy that he could hardly keep awake, I took upon myself to declare our true quality.

As became a Spanish gentleman, I rose from my seat and offered it to Don Nicholas. Also I uncloaked myself as I said, "You err in this, most worshipful. I am a hidalgo of Spain, the Count of Nullepart is a member of the French nobility, and Sir Richard Pendragon, although the fruit of a barbarous nation, is spoken of as one of its chief ornaments."

"So I am, good Don," said the English giant, opening his eyes somnolently as I mentioned his name; "they think of me well in London."

Yet here it was that our passages took a turn which was both unexpected and to be regretted. For no sooner had Don Nicholas heard the name of Sir Richard Pendragon, and had learned the barbarous sound of his voice, than he gave back a pace and cried out joyfully, "Body of Jesus! this is the captain of the English thieves who robbed the church of San Maria, and who broke out of his Majesty's prison the night before his execution."

"Surely it is!" cried the grey-bearded soldier. "It is that infamous foreign robber."

Sir Richard Pendragon rubbed the sleep out of his eyes, and into them there entered a kind of furtive humour.

"Rob a church!" he said, with that softness that was so surprising. "English Richard rob a church! Why, you poor, good souls, I was bred in a monastery; I have a kinsman a bishop; 'a was the brother of my sainted mother."

"Yes, it is the English robber," said Don Nicholas grimly. "The sight of him will be very pleasant to the King's majesty. He hath placed a thousand crowns on his head."

"Yon fellow might well want to cut it off," said Sir Richard Pendragon. "But rob a church—I with my integrity! Oh, these poor Spaniards! I fear their minds are as disorderly as those of the poor Dutch."

Yet now our situation was undoubtedly grave. The odds were ten against three. I cannot answer for the Count of Nullepart, but to judge by his air, his feelings in this pass must have been similar to my own. Whatever were the crimes of our companion, for the time being at least our fortunes were his. The King of Castile was our common enemy. We must defend our mistress's good servant, even if it cost us our lives.

Howbeit, he, confronted with such grave peril, still seemed not to heed the instancy of his case.

"Rob a church!" he said in that soft voice that was so sinister. "I, with the blood of kings under

my coat; I, the veritable son of a prince of a true propinquity—I despoil the good clergy! Why, you poor souls, you must have been drinking sherris."

"Have done, you rogue with a red face!" said Don Nicholas. "Bring a cord, one of you, that we may bind his hands."

"A cord, you good, honest Spaniard!" said the English giant. "Wherefore a cord, when gentle English Dickon would not outface a small she child in the arms of its kind female nurse?"

In despite of Sir Richard Pendragon's innocent protestations one of the soldiers produced a long stout cord, and under the direction of Don Nicholas prepared somewhat warily to pinion the hands of the English giant.

"Nay, come forward, good soldier," said Sir Richard Pendragon, stretching forth his wrists and crossing one over the other. "And if it is your humour, coil the rude cord around poor Dick. Come forward, I pray you; I have no defence but my virtue."

Upon this invitation, which was given with a courtesy which I, at least, had never heard before upon the lips of this formidable foreigner, the soldier stepped forward with his noose. And it was to be observed he was none other than that swaggerer who a few moments since had promised to cut off the head of the Englishman.

"This is a good honest cord," said Sir Richard Pendragon as it was about to be slipped upon him, "and you, honest Spaniard, appear to be a good mother's son."

And then in a flash, in a flash of incredible quickness, with the same sleek and courteous smile upon his lips, the English giant had plucked a dagger from under the folds of his mantle, and had stabbed the wretched soldier to the heart.

CHAPTER XXII.

WE ARE HARD BESET.

I CANNOT say what happened next. I only know that the three of us sprang to our feet fighting for our lives.

I had never seen blood drawn before in a quarrel; but now I had no time to speculate upon this ghastly proceeding. The sharp and cruel noise of steel was in our ears; the hot breaths of our foes were on our cheeks; and horrid cries, writhing forms, and devilish faces were all about us.

So soon as the man with the cord was stretched on the floor, the first thing of which I was truly sensible was that Don Nicholas himself was down. He fell almost in the same instant and by the same hand, and he lay horridly in a huddle, with the blood staining him in his mortal anguish.

The Englishman was now on his feet with his back to the wall and his sword free. All the soldiers in the venta, and they were not less than eight in number, infuriated by the sudden murder of their captain and their comrade, were springing upon him like a pack of wolves.

Howbeit, it was a wonderful blade that the Englishman bore. He resisted their first onset so ably that they fell back before him. Only the most superb address could have saved him, but this was at his command. Yet no sooner had they been repulsed than they came at him again. They began to press him severely, but in the moment of his need the Count of Nullepart made an intervention. Knocking up one of their swords with his own blade, he drew the man off and engaged him brilliantly.

I followed the Count of Nullepart's example, engaging a second fellow. And although my skill was as nothing beside that of my two comrades, my attack grew the more furious that it might supply its lack of science. At least, I know that hardly had I engaged the man I had chosen—a fellow who had crept forward to take the Englishman underneath while he dealt with the others—than I felt my father's good blade pass right through his body, and he sank with a groan to his knees.

Scarce had I freed the weapon than I heard the voice of Sir Richard Pendragon in my ears.

"Forth, good Don! Do you creep through to the horses and get them into the street."

Without waiting to look what happened further to my friends—for I knew their address to be great, and the only hope of saving their lives lay in getting out the horses at once—I contrived to force my way through the press of our foes, who paid me little attention. Running across the open passage-way to where our beasts were stabled, I proceeded to saddle them in the greatest haste.

And this was not rendered less by the knowledge that the landlord had run out into the street and was bawling lustily. All too soon we should have half the city upon us.

Thirty yards away, within the precincts of the inn kitchen, the steel rang ever louder and louder, and it seemed that I should never be able to get the saddles and bridles on to the three horses. But at last they were furnished, and one by one I led them through the narrow doorway into the street.

Hardly had I done this than I encountered on the threshold of the tavern a number of citizens and soldiers whom the cries of the landlord had summoned.

"The robber is within," I had the presence of mind to gasp breathlessly.

Thereupon they pressed forward into the inn without heeding the three horses.

Just as I was about to follow on their heels to see what aid I could render to my friends, the English giant fought his way out of the reeking interior. His chest was heaving, his sword was broken, and his face was dripping with blood and sweat. His great red eyes were as luminous as those of a tiger.

"The Count of Nullepart!" I cried. "Where is the Count of Nullepart!"

Before the Englishman could answer my question, the nimble form of our comrade had also emerged from the interior, which now was like a shambles. He too was covered in blood, and his face was as pale as a corpse.

It was an instant's work to spring into our saddles.

Yet quick as we were, we were hardly sharp enough. Soldiers and citizens were already thronging around us; their outstretched hands were striving to pull us down; and a most perilous hue and cry was arising in the streets of the city.

"In the name of the Virgin, let them not escape!" was a cry that was raised all about us.

For the moment, happily for us, none of this mob was mounted. Putting our horses at the press we clove a way through, still dealing fierce blows and receiving them; and at last, getting clear, we set off pell-mell down the street and through the narrow purlieus of the city. Under the cover of the darkness it began to seem that we had a reasonable prospect of escape.

Our fleet horses, a little recovered from the fatigues of the day, began to outstrip our pursuers; yet our danger was still very real, since in the labyrinth of ways and byways we were likely to be entrapped.

By a stroke of fortune Sir Richard Pendragon and the Count of Nullepart were familiar with Madrid, and were able to point a fair course to the southern gate of the city. However, no sooner had we come before it, with our pursuers well in the rear, than we had to encounter a new peril. The gate was locked for the night.

The urgency of our cries, and loud bawling of "In the name of the King!" drew the porter out of his hut. In one hand he bore a lanthorn and in the other a key, which was strapped to his girdle. He was an old man, very querulous and apparently very sleepy.

"Who are ye that ride forth at this hour?" he demanded. "Where are your passports signed by the constable of the city?"

"It is here, father," said Sir Richard Pendragon, leaning a little forward from the saddle and knocking the old man senseless with the hilt of his sword.

Leaping down from his horse, Sir Richard tore the key from the porter's girdle. In the next instant he had thrown back the gate, and our horses were through. Yet brief as this delay was, it was almost too much. Hardly had we crossed the boundary of the city ere the hue and cry was upon us.

The Englishman, however, was in nowise daunted by the necessity for haste. With that self-mastery and high instinct for action which a little time before had saved his life, he pulled the gate after him and turned the key almost against the very noses of our pursuers.

While some of them screamed oaths and shouted curses and administered to the senseless porter, and others attacked the staunch iron barrier, we rode into the darkness at a pace which was calculated not unduly to distress our already fatigued horses.

When we had made a league and the shouts of our foes were no longer in our ears, my excitement, which I confess had been very great, abated sufficiently to enable me to remember that my friends had suffered scathe in the inn. To my inquiry they returned the answer that they had never felt happier in any situation; and further, I received their commendation upon the part I had played.

"My young companion," said the Englishman,

"I make you my service. Your behaviour was so worthy in the hour of trial that I regret that I abused your nation. I never ask to see a young springald bear his sword better; and as for your five wits, they are those of a good boy. You have pleased me well, good Don; and I allow that your mother was an excellent person. And the same applies to your father."

A speech of this flattering civility, which I was happy to feel was my desert, gave me such pleasure that for the time I forgot that he who made it was undoubtedly a desperate and bloodthirsty character. Yet, in serving one to whom I was under the pledge of loyalty, I was committed to the interest of this bold and ruthless foreigner; besides, the events of the night had given me a taste for the life of a soldier, which had bred a high intoxication in my veins. And the effect of this delightful madness was singular. At this hour I seemed to care little for the righteousness of my cause or the integrity of my company. My soul was possessed with the knowledge that I had killed a fellow creature in an open quarrel; and now, riding in the summer darkness, it asked no more than the opportunity to kill another.

The Count of Nullepart also paid me a very civil compliment in his charming manner. But, as we rode knee to knee through the darkness, a strange silence fell upon our delightful friend. The path grew broken and uncertain, so that we were thrown about in our saddles; and the gay wisdom and laughter of our companion, which

had done so much to lighten our journey, was no longer to be heard. Never had I known this gentle maker of harmony addict himself to so much silence.

And then, quite suddenly, without sign or word or exclamation, the Count of Nullepart fell from his horse.

CHAPTER XXIII.

OF THE COUNT OF NULLEPART'S EXTREMITY.

It was with the deepest concern, for we had both come to love our companion, that Sir Richard Pendragon and I dismounted, and lifted up the prostrate form in our arms. In the heavy darkness of the night, which was rendered more extreme by the shadows from the overhanging trees, we were at first at a loss to know what was the cause of this calamity.

Our fear that the Count of Nullepart was dead was dispelled immediately. He could be heard to breathe. Passing our hands over him, however, we discovered that his doublet was soaked with blood. Yet for some time we were not able to discover the seat of what was evidently a grievous injury. Indeed it was not until we had revived our senseless comrade by bathing his temples in some stagnant water that we found in a rut in the middle of the road that we were able to learn its position and extent. It was by this providential

means that our unlucky friend was himself enabled to inform us.

"It is nothing," he said. "It is not more than a scratch. I pray you, leave me, my friends, to my own devices, for upon my soul you have not a moment to spare. By now a mounted company is surely upon our heels."

"Mounseer," said the Englishman, with a delicacy of address of which I should not have deemed him to be capable, "I care not if all Spain is out and mounted on the strain of Bucephalus. Do you suppose that one who hath the blood of kings under his doublet will leave you to the wolves? Where is your hurt, good Mounseer? We will look to it, if it please you."

In spite of the courage of our friend, who protested that his hurt was nothing and that time was much, we kept to our determination to find his injury. He then allowed that he had had several inches of steel in his ribs. "But it is nought, my friends; the merest trifle I assure you," he said as he staggered towards his horse.

All the same it was clear to us that if the Count of Nullepart was to continue his journey, means must be found to staunch the bleeding of his wound. Unhappily, we were without the implements of surgery; and the wound was so deep that our kerchiefs knotted together and coiled about it could not cope with the flow of blood.

In this pass the Englishman did a strange thing. It furnished a further proof of that genius for contrivance which above all things distinguished

this strange individual. Without more ado he proceeded to disrobe himself. Stripping off his shirt, and all naked to the waist as he was, he tore that garment into ribands and wove the pieces tightly round the Count of Nullepart's body. And so powerful was this ready-witted surgery that the wounded man vowed laughingly that the Englishman had checked not only his bleeding but the source of life itself.

Hardly had this skilful operation been performed, and before Sir Richard Pendragon could reinvest his skin with that doublet which was wont to enclose the blood of kings, when our ears were assailed with the sounds of armed men approaching rapidly in the darkness.

"Here comes John Castilian's wasp nest about our ears," said the Englishman grimly.

It was not a season for speech, however. Lifting the Count of Nullepart into his saddle, we tarried not an instant, but led our horses off the track. Rising sheer on either side of the road loomed the face of a steep mountain. It seemed well-nigh impossible to traverse it; and we had gone but a short distance along this difficult ascent when we stayed our progress to listen to our enemies, who passed noisily by us in the road below. To judge by the jingling of swords and bridles and the beating of hoofs against the stones, they formed a considerable mounted company. And I think had they not been riding carelessly they must have seen us, so short a distance were we from them.

When they had passed we continued to ascend

the mountain. Yet this adventure was fraught with great peril. There was no road to go upon; trees and rough boulders were strewn everywhere; and the higher we rose the more imminent it became that we should step over some steep precipice that lay concealed in the darkness. Sir Richard Pendragon made use of his scabbard in the same way that a blind man uses his staff. He tried every yard of the ground before his feet passed over it, for, as he said, "he desired not to fall into the Devil's Kitchen, lest he met man's Evil Adversary who was bound to perplex a good Catholic."

The Englishman being spared this calamity, owing to the exercise of much skill, we came at last to a large wood. Very grateful we felt for its promise of protection, yet its precincts looked so black that Sir Richard Pendragon said it would not surprise him at all if a wicked ogre dwelt in it, or a fell magician, or even a wizard or a salamander. In spite of these forebodings, which he declared to be the natural fruit of a brain that had been nourished upon the Roman authors in its youth, we felt ourselves to be quite safe from detection among the thick trees and with the dark night also to cover us. We led our weary horses within the wood and tied them up. Then, seeking out a dry and sheltered place, we spread our own weariness upon the green earth and folded our cloaks about us.

All through these long yet sweet hours of utter darkness my two comrades continued to sleep—the Count of Nullepart lightly and fitfully, Sir

Richard Pendragon with the perseverance of the fabled ones of Ephesus. And as thus I was stretched upon what I was fain to consider my first battlefield, with this fragrant redress never farther from my eyes, I was minded to resummon the image of the night's wild business; and with that natural instinct for the foibles of my fellow-men—a habit of philosophy which I can only ascribe to my mother—I proceeded to ruminate on the nature of those who lay by my side.

I think I may say these reflections were not unpleasant. My companions were strange, diverse, and foreign men; and one of them was certainly barbarous in the comparison with the gentlemen of our peninsula, who in matters of high civility are allowed to be the first in the world. Yet I found that I had already come to entertain towards them a sentiment of liberal fellowship, nay, even of love. The dangers we had already shared together, and perhaps the thought of those which were to come, which made my heart beat high as I lay upon the bare ground, caused me to forget their nation and their idiosyncrasy, and to cherish a feeling towards them which the gentle reader will hardly think consistent in one who boasted the sangre azul of Spain.

At the first sign of dawn Sir Richard Pendragon awoke, rose from his couch, and shook himself like a dog. He then announced that we must get upon our road at once, since our proximity to the King of Castile's chief city was highly perilous. It was with a tender concern that we awakened the poor

Count of Nullepart, who was still dozing fitfully. His face looked ashen pale in the grey morning light, but he gave us his assurance that he was fit to take the saddle.

Whether this was the case or not, and his looks denied him, the Count of Nullepart was a brave man, and he disdained our aid in mounting his horse. But never was a path so difficult and painful as the one we took that day. We dared not descend the mountain to the public road, lest we fell in with our foes, but were compelled to move by stealth across an almost insurmountable country, like a company of robbers skulking from lawful men.

In the soreness of our travail, which was such that on many occasions we had to dismount and lead our horses along places they could not take alone, we needed much resolution to support the pains of our journey. I know not what were the sufferings of our stricken companion, yet not a word of complaint escaped from his lips. As for Sir Richard Pendragon, his demeanour had become that of a brave man and a redoubtable leader.

The face of peril had changed him from an insolent trifler who was prone to insult a noble country to one who had a natural love of leadership, and who took cognisance of all the haps to which we were like to be exposed. His prescience was indeed very great. Doubtless it was the fruit of a long acquaintance with the arduous business of war. And although he appeared to have been bred in the love of danger, and admitted now and

again that "he had a passion to cut a throat," he had also the highest respect for his own person, and further he had a faithful servant's regard for the errand he had embraced.

The sun was high at noon ere our wanderings brought us to a hamlet in which we were able to find food and rest. It was situated in a remote part, where our enemies were not likely to trouble us. Here it was that the Count of Nullepart had his wound dressed and artfully bandaged, and Sir Richard Pendragon procured a shirt greatly too small for him. In this place we lay in shelter for two hours from the great heat of the day.

When towards evening we resumed our road in some refreshment of mind and body, we knew it better and embraced it with more certainty. Fortune attending on us, we came securely, a little after night had fallen, to a wayside inn. Here a rude but welcome hospitality was offered to us, and thus we lay in succour till the dawn.

During the next day the Count of Nullepart grew wonderfully better. Indeed, so favourable was his state that he celebrated it upon the flageolet as we halted in the shade at noon. Thus far, at the instance of a wonderful vigilance, in which Sir Richard Pendragon was accomplished beyond any person I have ever met, and by the further kind continuance of fortune, we were spared so much as even a trace of our enemies; and although our road was difficult and our progress slow, we began to make a sensible incursion upon the country of the King of Castile.

On the next night of our adventures we lay in a great wood. We kindled a fire of faggots and cooked a turkey which Sir Richard had conveyed from a farmyard. It made excellent eating, for hunger is of all sauces the most delectable; yet I must confess to you, reader, I had at first set my mind against it, being determined not to partake of that which had not been come by in a lawful manner. But my scruples were not proof against a dreadfully sharpened appetite, which was also fortified by the Englishman's plausibility.

"Why, you poor soul," said he, "we get nothing in this world save by enforcement. The farmer enforces the good turkey; one who is virtuous enforces the good farmer; and then comes hunger to enforce the one who is virtuous. And I ask you, my young son of the Spains, who is it, bethink, that enforces this veritable passion of hunger. Why, to be sure, it is the heavenly bodies who enforce the passion of hunger. And who is it that enforces the heavenly bodies? Why, you poor soul, to be sure it is Him who enforces the whole of the world."

I was fain to admit this was excellent philosophy, and the Count of Nullepart also admired it; and my belly being exceeding empty, and my resolve being weakened by this notorious subtlety, which you will believe had great weight with a natural philosopher such as myself, I was fain to eat of the turkey. And I cannot remember ever having eaten of anything more choice.

It has been my hap since those distant days in

my youth to sit with men of all sorts, in many countries, in many varieties of circumstance; but never with two more engaging in their diversity than these with whom my lot was cast upon this enterprise. The Count of Nullepart was so gay and graceful in address, so fortunate in his appearance, so debonair—to use a foreign idiom I have picked up in my travels; while Sir Richard Pendragon was all that his comrade was not, with a humour so sinister that it was hard to know how to receive it, one withal of barbarous ideas and a loose morality according to the tenets of a caballero of Spain. And yet beyond all things, and in whatever his merit might consist, this Englishman had a peculiar genius. He was a natural leader. For in every sort of action he discovered himself to be as wise as he was formidable; as full of knowledge as he was of sagacity; as little in ruth as he was bold in emprise.

Again I must confess to you, reader, that being the son of a Spanish gentleman, it was my nature to despise one such as he; yet I must declare to you, as I cherish an honourable name, that whenever this sinister foreigner threw me a compliment, which he did now and again, I was for all the world like a dog that has received a bone.

I have never been able to account for this behaviour. There can be no doubt about my father's pedigree, and any Asturian will inform you that the family of my mother is beyond cavil. Yet in all our subsequent passages with this formidable islander, who in some ways was little better than

one of the wicked, as there was too good a reason to know, in whatever path he walked the Count of Nullepart and myself were happy to attend him.

After our meal, as we lay under the trees in the wood, I conversed with the worthy Count of Nullepart upon this subject. Sir Richard Pendragon had already fallen asleep. It was his boast that he could command this solace at any moment of the day or night.

"It is the power of the mind, my dear Don Miguel," said the Count of Nullepart. "This ingenious and subtle adventurer has a power of mind that a god might envy."

"But, worshipful Count of Nullepart," I protested, "his manners are ungentle; he insults a noble country; he traduces an ancient name; he takes life without remorse and with a most practised hand. He reveres not the truth, and he is over-familiar with the All-Wise Creator. Wherefore, Sir Count, if his mind is as you say, doth he not walk abroad with decency?"

"My dear Don Miguel," said the Count of Nullepart, "it is because of his natural force. Does the wind walk abroad with decency? It can be soft and courteous, yet more often it is rude and violent. But whatever its humour, all of us, Spanish hidalgo or French rapscallion, must obey its whims. It is the same with this Englishman. He knows no law save his natural puissance; and you and I, my dear, have not the power to do other than respect it."

Upon this the Count of Nullepart drew his

cloak about him and went to sleep. I was not satisfied in the least as to the ground on which I went, but being too fatigued to confer further with my thoughts I was fain also to do the same.

In the course of a long week's journey we had quitted the dominion of the King of Castile, and the perils of the road were diminished sensibly. Thenceforward we took again to the public ways, and were glad indeed of the additional comfort and security.

I was now permitted to observe more clearly the beauties of nature, for all the fair provinces through which we passed were strange to me. And this I did the more particularly, I think, since at the many reflections I was moved to make upon the sweet qualities of the hills and valleys and the streams and meadows by which we passed, Sir Richard Pendragon took upon himself to deride continually that which he called "my peninsularity;" and though admitting "that the scene was not amiss, considering that it was set in a dry climate, it compared very poorly with the honest woodland pastures in the vicinity of Wapping, which was near to London City."

When we drew near to that most noble chain of mountains which in these parts is called the Pyrenees, and whose serious magnificence, which transcended all that my mind had ever conceived of our most wonderful country, was spread before my gaze, I turned to my foreign companion with a sense of triumph that I could not restrain.

"I will allow your country to be a fair place, worshipful Sir Richard Pendragon," I said, "but if it has aught to compare with these tall mountains, it must be heaven itself, which is the home of the good God."

"Why, you poor mad soul!" said he contemptuously, "you speak of these as mountains—mountains, you soft goose? Why, they would speak of them as dunghills if they were near to London."

This insolent disdain of my country—for how else could a true son of Iberia regard such words?—gave me such an anger against the Englishman that I declined to speak with him for some time. No sooner did he discover the cause of my silence than his language grew still more licentious. "Pyrenees forsooth!" he exclaimed. "Mountains, ecod! Does the poor mad soul think I was born at Dublin?"

Thereupon I withdrew my horse fifty paces to the rear, for I was determined that I would not remain in the company of one who wounded my country. Then it was that his demeanour changed. He made quite a handsome apology to Spain, withal accompanied by such a whimsical pleasantness that I was fain to forgive him, although exacting the condition that whatever was the higher merit of his native England, which I could not for a moment accept, he would make abatement of it in my presence.

Upon this Sir Richard Pendragon bent forward and whispered in the ear of the extraordinary quadruped he was bestriding, for he had the habit

of talking continually to this most strange beast. "'Tis a hard condition, is it not, good Melanto, for you and me that have such opinions of our own? But this youthful Don is a mad fellow, is he not, Melanto? Yet with the permission of Heaven you and I will always respect the whims of madness."

Among other things, as became my elevation of mind, I had wondered many times why this singular quadruped—horse I will not call it—should bear such a remarkable name. It appeared to be the height of idiosyncrasy to bestow upon a four-footed beast a name which could only have been familiar to scholars. And so, to appease my curiosity and to change the unlucky tenour of our discourse, I said, "Wherefore, kind and gracious Sir Richard Pendragon, do you call your four-footed quadruped by the name of Melanto? Is not the name passing odd for a shaggy animal with a long tail?"

"Well, my young companion, if you must know the reason," said the Englishman, "he owes the name of Melanto to his preoccupation with the things of the mind."

"Is that the name of one of the learned?" I asked dubiously, because I had to confess that to myself it was wholly dark.

"Melanto," said Sir Richard Pendragon, "was the name of a learned Mongolian who founded a religious order. First a sea captain, he became an astrologer in his later years, in order that he might confer with the stars in their courses and the works of nature."

"I was ignorant of these facts," I owned humbly, for Sir Richard seemed to imply that an enlightened mind should be familiar with these things, "but doubtless they are well acquainted with them at Salamanca."

"Doubtless they are, good Don," said Sir Richard Pendragon gravely.

At this moment the Count of Nullepart was so shaken with laughter that I feared he might fall from his horse. Upon what pretext he indulged it I do not know; but as he was much addicted to mirth which seemed without any true cause to call it forth, I was fain to ascribe it to his French nationality, which, as all the world knows, has too little regard for the light of reason.

Perhaps we had been some twenty days on our journey by the time we came into France. As we approached that curious country, which in nowise resembles that of Spain, I inquired of my companions wherein this land differed especially from that of its surpassing neighbour.

"It is the inhabitants, good Don, that make the difference," Sir Richard Pendragon informed me. "They grimace like monkeys and are addicted to the practice of eating frogs."

"But, good Sir Richard Pendragon," said I, "the worshipful Count of Nullepart is of this nation, and upon my life I have never observed him grimace like a monkey, and I will answer for it that his table manners are so delicate that he would eschew the practice of eating frogs."

"My dear Don Miguel," said the Count of

Nullepart, smiling, "upon what pretext do you associate one so inconsiderable as myself with that meritorious nation, the French?"

"Surely, Sir Count, your name is your guarantee," I rejoined. "At least I have always understood it to be so."

"In that particular you are doubtless correct, my dear Don Miguel," said the Count of Nullepart, "at least that is when I travel in Spain. But now we are over the French border I rejoice in a better."

I inquired his further title with some surprise.

"Upon the curious soil of France," said the Count of Nullepart, "I go by the name of Señor Fulano or Mr. What-you-will."

"I protest, Sir Count, I do not understand this matter at all."

"I pray you seek not to do so, my dear," said the Count of Nullepart. "It is only that I choose to have it so as becomes a free born citizen of the world."

I could get no further enlightenment from the Count of Nullepart, and no sooner had we crossed into France than my mystification was increased. At the inn at the first town we came to, of which I forget the name, the Count of Nullepart declared solemnly that we must speak for him on all occasions, for by a singular mischance he had entirely mislaid the use of the French tongue. And, further, he assured us that this grave calamity had had the unprecedented consequence of stimulating in the highest degree the growth of his chin hairs. Indeed,

this growth was so remarkable that even upon our first day in France he had acquired quite a large beard.

Instead, then, of the gay, sprightly, and handsome Count of Nullepart, an admired member of the French nobility, with whom we had come upon our journey from Toledo, we had for a companion upon French soil one Señor Fulano, a staid, sober, and bearded citizen, who claimed cousinship with the burgomaster of the town of El Dorado, a place of which I never heard the name.

"I protest, Sir Count," said I, "there is no such place as El Dorado in the length and breadth of our peninsula."

This caused the Count of Nullepart and Sir Richard Pendragon a vast amount of mirth, and I heard the latter declare that even his preposterous horse Melanto was chuckling furiously.

"The truth is, good Master Fulano," said the Englishman, "these youthful Spaniardoes have so little fantasy as a trussed fowl. Personally I ascribe their heaviness to the dryness of their climate and the rough quality of their wines."

"That is the root of the matter, doubtless," said the Count of Nullepart in a most execrable and rustic Spanish which you would think a gentleman would be careful not to use.

Be this as it may, from the moment we crossed into France, and during the whole time of our sojourn in that unprofitable country, the Count of Nullepart, or Señor Fulano as he would have us call him, had no French at all. Whenever he

had occasion to speak he used Spanish of a most rustic and barbarous sort.

Much as I disliked the country of France, I disliked the people, their cookery, their manner of speaking, and their extremely foreign ways even more. As I had small skill in their language, and the Count of Nullepart had so mysteriously laid aside that which he could claim, we had greatly to depend upon Sir Richard Pendragon's knowledge and adroitness for the least of our necessities. And to allow a due to the devil—as my countrymen express it—it must be said that the well-being of three travellers in a foreign country could not have been in worthier hands.

Sir Richard Pendragon's use of the French tongue, which I doubt not to polite ears must have been as unseemly as his use of Castilian, was so vigorous and his eyes rolled so freely, the name of God and his Evil Adversary were so constantly upon his lips, and his hand was so seldom off the hilt of his sword, that the French innkeepers vied with each other in doing his behests, almost before he had been put to the inconvenience of making them known. I cannot remember—although on several occasions he has informed me of the number—how many temporal kings of whom Sir Richard Pendragon claimed kinship and acquaintancy, but at least he wore their manners in such wise as to know how to be obeyed. Full many an innkeeper have I seen turn pale at his utterance of the word "Sapristi!" And so surprised were some of them to find themselves alive by the time

he quitted their houses that they forgot to ask him for the score, or perhaps it was that they feared to do so. At least I know that in several instances they must have gone unpaid had not the Señor Fulano thrown them a silver dollar.

I had no favourable impression of this country of France. I suppose it is a pleasant country; at least I have met those who allow it to be so; but to the eye of a true Iberian it seemed to lack colour, politeness, and originality. Besides, as soon as we came to the first place out of Spain, of which, as I have said, I forget the name, it came on to rain; and during the whole time we were in this unfortunate land, which could not have been less than thirty days, it continued to do so. I know not whether the inhabitants of the country subsist upon frogs, as was said of them by Sir Richard Pendragon, but if he spoke truly it was doubtless in obedience to the dispensation of the good God, for their favourite food was continually to be seen swimming in the pools that lay in the middle of their roads.

I suppose it was about the thirty-sixth day of our long and arduous journey that we came into Paris. It was nightfall when we reached the capital of madam's nephew, the famous King Louis. It had been raining all that day, and the day before that, and it was still raining, and we were covered with mud as high as our cheek bones. Our cloaks were soaked through and through and were running over with water. Further we were hungry and fatigued and in a desperately evil

humour; yet instead of entering the first inn we came to within the precincts of the city, Sir Richard Pendragon would have us repair to the auberge of the Compas d'Or, hard by to what is called the Sorbonne, which Sir Richard pronounced "Sawbones" and said was the same that in London was called the College of Surgeons.

This auberge of the Compas d'Or—I have no curiosity to learn what the name would mean in pure Castilian, but they would tell you perhaps at Salamanca—was, according to Sir Richard Pendragon, the best inn at Paris. Indeed, it was a trait I had observed in him that no matter how hungry or weary or out of humour he might be, whenever he came to a town or city where there was more than one inn from which to choose, and some places through which we passed kept quite a number, he would select the one which had the best food, the best wine, the best corner in which to sup, and the best chamber in which to sleep. It was due, he said, to the blood of kings that its board and bed should be princely.

Thus when we came in this pouring wet night to the auberge of the Compas d'Or, and we had seen to it that our honest horses were cared for worthily by the ostlers of this great inn, we entered a large and comfortable room. And no sooner had we made our appearance in it than Sir Richard Pendragon's mode of address occasioned some surprise to the company we found there.

CHAPTER XXIV.

OF SIR RICHARD PENDRAGON'S PASSAGES WITH THE GENTLEMEN OF THE KING'S GUARD.

THE large room was half full of a distinguished company. Many of the persons there assembled wore a handsome and imposing livery; others wore an equally handsome and imposing garb of peace. These gentlemen were engaged in playing at the cards and throwing the dice, and all were men whose air was lofty. Immediately we had come into their midst, the proprietor of the auberge —I can see him at this moment, a little round fellow with a great belly—came forward half nervously, half uncivilly, crying that we must withdraw at once, as the apartment was reserved for the gentlemen and the friends of the gentlemen of the King's Guard.

"Oho!" said Sir Richard Pendragon, in a voice that rose like a trumpet, "these honest Parley-voos will not look askance on the hereditary overlord of the Russ, his court chamberlain, and his second minister. Do you assure them, good Beer-barrel, with our compliments, that they will find us pleasant good fellows when we have dried our doublets; but for this present we are cold and fatigued and most infernally hungry."

I know not whether the manner of this address, the matter of which was communicated to me at my own request by the Count of Nullepart, was an

offence to the proud feelings of the gentlemen of the King's Guard, but one and all turned glances upon us of the greatest amazement and austerity.

Sir Richard Pendragon, however, paid them not the slightest heed. Observing a vacant chair beside a small table, he flung himself into it, and ordered the keeper of the auberge, in the voice he was accustomed to use to persons of that condition, to bring us wine and victual.

"But, sir," said the innkeeper—I am indebted to my worshipful friend the Count of Nullepart for all that follows—"you and your friends cannot remain in this apartment. As I have informed you already, it is only for the use of the gentlemen and the friends of the gentlemen of the King's Guard."

"Well, you French monkey," said the English giant, rolling his eyes fearfully, "you may choose for yourself. Either you obey me this minute, or, as I am a Christian gentleman, I will cut off your ears."

Swearing an oath that blenched the cheek of the innkeeper, and scowling with the ferocity that never failed to cow all of this kidney, Sir Richard Pendragon drew his sword with a flourish, made a magnificent pass at the air, and stuck it at one pace from him in the wooden floor.

I think I have never seen more amazement in the human countenance than this action excited in all who witnessed it. At first the onlookers seemed unwilling to believe their eyes. That any human being should enter their presence and thus bear

himself was a thing they could not grasp. And then, when they came to realize that the Englishman regarded their presence no more than he did that of the innkeeper, a kind of pitying contempt came into their faces.

Nevertheless, some little time went by ere they addressed Sir Richard Pendragon. Conversing together in low tones, they appeared to wait upon the good pleasure of one among them. Then they called the landlord, who stood awaiting their commands, and gave him certain instructions.

Upon receipt of these the keeper of the auberge approached Sir Richard Pendragon, yet with a good deal of wariness, and said, "Monsieur, I am instructed by the gentlemen of the King's Guard to inform you that, whoever you may be, your behaviour is intolerable. But as you and your companions are clearly of a foreign nation, they are loth to admonish you. Yet I am to inform you that if you do not immediately put up your sword and withdraw from this apartment, you will compel them to visit you according to your merit."

Now, although the keeper of the auberge, having both right and might at his elbow, had spoken with a well considered civility which is rare in his class, and the words that he had been instructed to use were those of an admirable moderation, which in the circumstances did honour to his patrons, they were not accepted by Sir Richard Pendragon in a spirit of forbearance.

"Do you presume to outface a Pendragon, you

French dog?" he roared. "For a pint of sherris I would pull your neck."

Speaking thus, the Englishman took up a cup half full of the wine that was near to him, and flung it full at the head of the innkeeper.

In spite, however, of this new affront to their ambassador, the gentlemen of the King's Guard showed no disposition to hurry their measures. Again they conversed among themselves; and then a thin, tall man, with a visage exceeding melancholy, not, however, in the king's livery, yet attired in a dress of sober richness, rose slowly from the table at which he had been playing at the cards. There was something of majesty in his movements, and as he approached the Count of Nullepart and myself with a cold air, his mien was worthy of a cardinal.

"I would speak with you, my friends," he said in a deep and musical voice, yet the tone was such as he would have used to his lackeys.

The Count of Nullepart shook his head solemnly, as though he understood not a word, and said in a rude Spanish, "I have not your language, Señor Soldado."

I had to make a similar confession, but, as I hope, in a purer idiom.

"Muy bien," said this distinguished French gentleman, speaking in a very tolerable Spanish that put the Count of Nullepart's to shame and compared not unfavourably with my own, "Very well, my friends, a word in your ears. Your conduct is worthy of the highest censure, but the

gentlemen of the King's Guard are not accustomed to turn their hands against the canaille. All the same, they pray you to have a care."

Thus having spoken with a degree of insolent contempt that few could have equalled, this Frenchman, and I am sure among his own nation he must have taken rank as a great lord, turned his back upon us with a high degree of disdain, and proceeded to regard Sir Richard Pendragon. The English giant met him with a sleepy indifference. Thereupon the Frenchman lowered his gaze to an amused contempt, and withdrew Sir Richard Pendragon's sword from the floor.

After examining this weapon with a care that was only half curious he gave his shoulders a shrug, after the foreign manner, and then presented it to the Englishman by the hilt, saying, "Put up your butter-cutter, Monsieur l'Epicier, and when you return into your peninsula give an additional alms to the Virgin that you find yourself with as whole a skin as that with which you went."

Being addressed in this fashion, an odd change fell upon the Englishman. As in the affair in the inn at Madrid, a kind of sinister softness overtook him. Immediately he abated his voice into a modest and humble accent which was quite unlike his previous immoderation.

"I thank you, good Frenchman, for my poor tuck. It is an ancient arm, I might say an heirloom; yet once on a day it held the rank of a sword. At least, in that capacity was it given to an elderly forebear by Edward the Black Prince,

who in his day did some pretty work among the French. And now, as you say, although it is an old thing, it still serves to cut butter."

Thereupon, in the presence of the whole room, which had suspended its affairs entirely, Sir Richard Pendragon quietly laid the flat part of the sword against one side of the Frenchman's cheek and then against the other.

CHAPTER XXV.

OF SIR RICHARD PENDRAGON'S DUELLO WITH THE GALLANT FRENCHMAN.

ANY excitement that was likely to arise was checked by the Frenchman's action. With a dark and cold smile on his lips, he turned to his friends and held up a slender white hand that was covered with jewels, and besought them, almost in a tone of entreaty, to display calmness.

Then with a most courteous apology to all who had suspended their play, and remarking that it was plaguy unfortunate that he must suspend his own when the cards had smiled upon him for the first time in a long season, he ordered the landlord to have all the room's furniture drawn close to the wall,

While this was being done, the Count of Nullepart went to the Englishman and addressed him privily.

"This fellow," said he, "is the first swordsman

in France. He is the hero of a hundred duellos, and he is quite invincible."

"Is he so, my dear?" said the English giant in his modest voice, which seemed to feign alarm. "How pleasant it must be for the poor soul to be invincible."

Sir Richard Pendragon turned to me and said in a manner of courtesy I had seldom heard him use, "Prithee, good Don Miguel, oblige old honest Dickon by going into the stable yonder and procuring that little rapier of Ferrara steel, which you will find strapped to the saddle of the meritorious Melanto, who is now eating his supper of oats like a good Christian horse."

In obedience to this request, I went forth to the stable to procure the rapier of Ferrara steel. Upon returning with it into the room, I found that a goodly space had been cleared in the centre. Both parties to the duello were standing therein stripped of their doublets. The spectators, exceeding a score in number, were seated on settles which were ranged close to the wall.

It was curious to observe the looks of mingled contempt, pity, and derision of these persons when I approached the Englishman and handed to him the Italian rapier. Some of them were unable to repress their mirth. They laughed out loudly, as though my action was the height of the ridiculous.

Before I had taken the chair that was offered to me, these adversaries had crossed their swords. If I live to be a hundred years old I shall never forget the battle that ensued. At the first shock

of steel against steel it was clear that each recognized in the other a foremost swordsman of the age.

The knowledge did not induce fury nor any kind of excitement. It rendered them calmer, more wary, and subtle than they would have been otherwise. And the gentlemen present, each of whom, as the Count of Nullepart informed me, was a master of the sword, began soon to realize that one of their peers had come quite unexpectedly into their midst.

It was not all at once that this was made clear to them. At first they regarded the contest with smiles that were merely mocking and incredulous. Naturally it seemed the extreme of presumption that such a fellow, whose manners and appearance were so barbarous, should venture to stand up with a delicate and slender Italian weapon before the first swordsman of the time. But so soon as their true blades had met, the company began to exchange significant glances one with another, and in a very little while they realized that this was no tyro who stood before them.

From the first it was beautiful play. Owing to his stature, it was necessary that the Englishman should lose something of elegance in the comparison with his inimitable adversary, but, stroke and counterstroke, they were perfectly matched.

The spectators inclined to the opinion at first that Monsieur du Bartas, for that was the name of their champion, the foremost in all France, was not putting forth the whole of his art; but when presently they came to perceive how easily his deftest strokes were turned aside, they began to waver.

It was a long duello, yet it was one of which every phase was memorable. These two wonderfully accomplished men began to weave a spell upon their audience; and as their actions grew quicker and the finer shades of their play declared themselves, the spectators began to lean forward out of their seats, and with the loud and ringing music of the steel was mingled " bravas " and all kinds of applause.

As the combat proceeded the excitement grew more intense. The spectators seemed not to breathe. For the first time in his career their invincible champion stood in danger. No matter what the cunning and the incomparable skill of his devices, it began to appear that unless the unforeseen occurred to save him he went in danger of his life.

It was then that the buzz of voices and the murmurs of applause grew hushed, and soon the gay shouts, the sneering smiles, the sarcasm of their commentary, yielded to a dead silence. The circle of onlookers craned ever closer to the combatants, yet now not a word was spoken; and upon the faces of many there was a mingled surprise and consternation that they sought not to conceal. For the countenance of the first swordsman in France was growing livid. The sweat had crept upon his brow. Proud and brave man though he was, he had begun to feel himself in the grip of a power beyond his own.

As with amazing skill the Englishman parried stroke after stroke, which were themselves the fine flowers of his adversary's talent, each one of which

must have sufficed to place one less in genius out of his life, I overheard a bewildered gentleman of the King's Guard say to a companion, " This fellow must be the Devil ! "

All at once and quite suddenly there came the sound of bare steel striking the ground. The celebrated Frenchman, the hero of a hundred duellos, stood without a weapon before his adversary.

It was a moment I shall never forget. The sympathies of the Count of Nullepart and myself were of course engaged upon the side of Sir Richard Pendragon ; but as this noble and imperious French gentleman stood with head upheld and a look of disdain upon his lips to receive the penalty of his failure, I think, in common with all the other witnesses of this splendid encounter, the count and I would have been only too eager to avert it could we have done so.

Yet Monsieur du Bartas looked not for mercy. He was known as one who neither gave quarter nor expected to receive it. None, therefore, looked for mercy for him. The Englishman had gained the victory in fair fight ; it was perfectly just that he should enjoy its fruits. Such an expectation, however, merely shows how imperfect a thing is the science of reason, and how simple it is to do less than justice even to our friends. For none could have foreseen, least of all the Count of Nullepart and myself, that Sir Richard Pendragon, one of a rude and uncivilized nation, would stoop to pick up a fallen sword and, with a bow that would have

become the most accomplished of courtiers, return it to his conquered adversary.

It was then that the silence of the gentlemen of the King's Guard yielded to expressions of pleasure. They crowded round the victor, shook him by the hand, paid him most flattering addresses; and nothing would content these Frenchmen, regaled as they had been by great generosity and the highest skill, save that the Englishman and also his companions should remain with them, drink their wine, and partake of their hospitality.

Indeed, the rest of the evening was the most delectable it could have been given to any travellers to spend. We were treated with the most distinguished consideration by those who were not accustomed to exercise it on a light pretext. Yet it soon became clear that they had come to regard their guests as mysterious.

The French, as all travellers allow, are people of quick parts; and while they feasted and flattered us, it was plain to these gentlemen that we were other than we seemed. With all the courtesy possible, for even the Englishman could doff his brusque manners when it suited his humour, we declined to disclose a word of our embassy, contenting ourselves merely with inquiring whether the King was at Paris. It was our good fortune to learn that he was.

As the evening passed we felt ourselves to be the objects of a particular scrutiny. Our new friends grew most curious concerning us. After we had supped they asked us to take a hand at

the cards. My two companions accepted this invitation; but I refrained from it because I was still very poor, and perhaps quite as conclusively because my northern breeding induces the virtue of caution.

No sooner had Sir Richard Pendragon and the Count of Nullepart begun to play than the interest of these gentlemen grew lively indeed. This was not so much aroused by the demeanour of the conqueror of M. du Bartas, but rather by that of the Count of Nullepart, who, in spite of his long beard and rustical Spanish, betrayed his true condition in unsuspected ways to those who were themselves highborn.

First, they observed his white and shapely hands as they lay upon the board. Again, there was the delicacy of his features, the natural politeness of his gestures; and yet again, they could not fail to detect the subtle and charming quality of the accent that lurked beneath his assumption of a rustical brogue. Thus it fell out that presently they came once more to confer among themselves, and then one of these gentlemen said with a most profound respect to the so-called Señor Fulano, "By my life, monseigneur, is not this a——"

Before this gentleman could conclude his remark the Count of Nullepart answered him in his charming natural speech and in the French tongue, "My good Clery, you are seldom prudent in the evening; and I am told it is entirely due to this misfortune of yours that you still remain

without advancement. All the world knows that at Paris nowadays one must learn to see little and to speak less."

No sooner had the gentlemen of the King's Guard recovered from an astonishment which at first seemed to overwhelm them than they began to shout with laughter. For what reason they should thus view the matter I cannot explain; but from that moment a more formal air was imparted to the assembly. Something of ceremony declared itself, and the manner of all present became perceptibly less easy. Still this may in a measure have been due to the fact that these gentlemen put forth remarkable and in some cases highly ludicrous efforts to conduct their discourse in Castilian.

In one particular, however, our singular companion saw fit to rebuke them. They persisted in bestowing upon him the title of "Monseigneur," so that presently he was moved to exclaim, "I pray you remember, my good friends, that I am neither more nor less than the worshipful Señor Fulano, worshipful kinsman to the worshipful burgomaster of the worshipful town of El Dorado. Beyond this I claim no title. And when the Señor Fulano comes among you to-morrow at the Louvre, which a conspiracy on the part of fortune has rendered necessary, I pray you not to call the honest person out of his true degree."

Laughter and surprise greeted this speech; yet a kind of respect was paid to it, and during the rest of the evening they were careful to heed this request.

These gentlemen sat at their gaming far into the night. The play was high; gold pieces were numerous, being piled upon the table and exchanged freely. Also they drank an immense quantity of a very superior kind of red wine. Whatever the individual fortunes of the players, and of these I cannot speak, there was at least one among them who rose from the board considerably richer in the things of this world than when he sat down at it. I allude to Sir Richard Pendragon. Both the Count of Nullepart and myself were fain to observe that, whenever it came to the Englishman's turn to take the dice in hand, quite as often as not he would have the singular good fortune to cast the double six.

CHAPTER XXVI.

OF OUR APPEARANCE AT THE LOUVRÈ BEFORE KING LOUIS.

At noon the next day we set out upon our embassy to the King of France. However, before so doing, at the instance of Sir Richard Pendragon we repaired to a furrier's shop in a little narrow street behind the church called Notre Dame, which the Count of Nullepart informed us was the first in the city. Here we purchased three baldricks of an extraordinary brilliancy, trimmed with ermine.

To our surprise, Sir Richard Pendragon disbursed the sum necessary to this magnificence,

for his winnings of the previous night had been considerable. Besides, as he declared, it was due to our mistress "that the plenipotentiary-extraordinaire of the young queen's majesty should appear at Paris like a man of condition, and that the retinue by whom he was accompanied should appear in the same guise, because they had worldly minds at the French court, and it would be easier to conduct state business if they went upon terms of familiarity with the current mode."

To this piece of wisdom the Count of Nullepart assented laughingly. And when our leader came to put on his baldrick this mirth bubbled up to a point, for Sir Richard Pendragon was fain to add to it a pair of new shoes with large silver buckles and a handsome collar of lace.

I confess that in this I approved of the Englishman's conduct. And I think we both felt the Count of Nullepart's laughter to be somewhat ill judged and out of place. Because in a city like Paris, which in the light of day is not unpleasing, and among such a people as the French, whom travellers allow to have a savour of the civilized arts, we deemed that a certain richness among men of birth was not only expedient but necessary.

Therefore I put on my new baldrick trimmed with ermine, also my new shoes with silver buckles and my fine collar of lace which also had been given to us. And let me tell you, reader, that never in my life have I felt myself to be attired more worthily, a little the plain side of splendour. Even then I felt that I did not compare with the

leader of our embassy, who, as he said, "to remove any lingering traces of the provinces," added to the bedizenments of his person a number of jewels which his good fortune of the previous night enabled him to obtain; and, further, as a crown to the whole, a sort of jewelled cockado that is worn by the potentates of Eastern climes.

To obtain a field for the display of our magnificence, of which I believe the three of us were proudly and justly conscious, we proceeded slowly, arm in arm, down the centre of the streets of Paris; and of almost every second person that passed us Sir Richard Pendragon inquired in a haughty voice of the way to the palace of the King of France.

I suppose it was our high and martial looks in company of our resplendent attire—I may say that Sir Richard Pendragon had chosen scarlet for the colour of our baldricks, that they might contrast elegantly with the bright yellow of his own—that soon began to attract the notice of the Parisians. Ere long a number of these curious persons were following in our wake. By the time we had traversed the length of two streets something of a crowd had collected upon our heels; and this circumstance appeared to afford Sir Richard Pendragon a great deal of pleasure.

"These good souls can see we are on the way to King Lewie," said he. "I am perfectly sure they mistake me for the Emperor Maximilian, although I have five inches the better of my old crony in the matter of perpendicularity, and at least

six in the matter of circumference. Still they cannot be expected to be informed of it. And prithee, good Don Miguel Jesus Maria de Sarda y Boegas, do you observe how all eyes are for my Persian cockado? I doubt not it looks very brave with court livery; and it will afford me not the least surprise if King Lewie, who is a good fellow, comes to adopt it at the court of France."

Just as the English giant had concluded this speech, a little old woman came up behind him and plucked him eagerly by the cloak.

"Good Master Tumbler," said she, "if you will stand on your head I will give you a groat; and if you will swallow your sword you shall have a new franc piece."

Sir Richard Pendragon plucked his cloak away fiercely from the old creature and walked on with his head in the air, as though he had not heard her. During the next moment, however, an unmannerly urchin had thrown a cake of mud at the Persian cockado.

By the time we had come to the gates of the Louvre, the press was so great that it had become difficult to proceed in it. Indeed, according to the Count of Nullepart's computation, and he seemed to derive much pleasure from assessing it, it could not have been less than a thousand persons.

To the astonishment of our leader, when we came before the gates of the palace, the soldiers of the King's Guard, who kept the royal entrance, declined to allow us to pass. And when Sir Richard Pendragon threatened peremptorily to cut

off the ears of their captain, the prospect of our gaining admittance did not seem to improve. For some reason, which I cannot explain, the attitude of the King's Guard seemed greatly to please the mob that was pressing around us.

Sir Richard Pendragon was fain to produce the cartel of our mistress duly sealed and inscribed: "To Lewis Our Nephew in His Court at Paris, by the hands of Our Good Servants." Yet even this document went without effect, if only for the reason, as the Count of Nullepart assured us, that the captain of the King's Guard was unable so much as to decipher the superscription.

In the next minute there was almost a riot in the open street. The English giant, seeming to detect the cries of derision arising about him, turned to the ever-increasing multitude and observing a low fellow that was near to him in the act of making an insulting grimace, he made no more to do, but lifted him up bodily, and flung him like a sack of flour upon the heads of the people.

Upon this, mud and stones began to fly past us. And a missile having struck Sir Richard Pendragon upon the cheek, he drew his sword and began to lay about him lustily with the flat of it.

Our situation was now one of great peril. Three persons, whatever their valour, were powerless to defend themselves from a press of this magnitude. I incline to think our fate would have been a sorry one had not the mother-wit of the Count of Nullepart arranged our deliverance. While the mob were surging angrily around us and stones were

flying about our ears, our companion spoke some words in a low voice to the captain of the King's Guard, and this time he used the French tongue. The effect was like magic. The captain instantly removed his plumed hat, and bowing very low, led us through the gate and into the precincts of the palace, leaving his company to deal in what sort it suited them with a mob that by now was in no gentle humour.

Once within the walls of the palace, the Count of Nullepart dismissed the King's officer with a word of thanks; and then, under the count's own direction, we entered an exceeding large ante-chamber, which was thronged with as fine a company as I have ever beheld. There were priests of high learning and dignity, wearing their soutanes; there were soldiers in bright doublets and shining armour; there were austere and sombre-coated ministers; there were gay and handsome courtiers in very modish and brilliant attire; and beyond all else there was a number of beautiful ladies.

This fine company was talking very loudly and laughing very gaily at the time we came into the room. But our entrance being a public one, mainly owing to the manner in which Sir Richard Pendragon clanked his spurs on the marble floor and the great voice in which he conversed with the Count of Nullepart, the attention of all present was immediately drawn upon us. Now I know not whether it was due to the magnificence of our apparel or the pride of our bearing, yet the lively

talk and the gay mirth subsided in the most sudden manner. Each person in the room seemed to turn to regard us with a wonderment that scorned disguise; and then the silence was broken by a titter from one of the fine ladies.

The court gallants who surrounded them were not slow to follow their example.

The leader of our embassy, however, was not disconcerted in the least by this public rudeness. Sir Richard Pendragon stroked his chin with a disdain that appeared to amuse these courtiers the more; and then, turning at his leisure to the richly attired gallant that was nearest to him, he said in a voice like thunder, "Hi, you, sirrah, you with a face like a monkey, do you go to the King your master, and do you inform him that an embassy is come from Spain upon an affair of delicacy."

The youthful courtier placed his jewelled fingers on the hilt of his sword. His unseasonable mirth was now changed to a look of ferocious anger.

"Do you hear me, good jackanapes?" said the English giant in his great insolent voice that surmounted everything and re-echoed to the high ceiling upon which was a painting of Venus and Cupid.

"Mon Dieu!" cried the courtier, livid with passion, "I have a mind to run you through the body, you canary-coloured barbarian!"

"A mind, did you say, good jackanapes?" said the Englishman, with a roar of laughter. "Why, a thousand such poor dogs could not muster a mind among you."

By now all the persons in the room were gathered around us. The grave among them were amazed; the young, and particularly those that were female, shaken with mirth; and the rest in all degrees of anger, incredulity, excitement, and a desire for diversion. Yet so sorely incensed was this youthful gallant that I verily believe, the place and the company notwithstanding, he would have been moved to an act of open violence to avenge the insult that had been set upon him, had there not stepped forth from the throng one who bore every mark of dignity and high consideration.

"I ask your pardon, Monsieur Ambassador," said he with a courtesy that was very grave, "but if it is your desire to have an audience of his majesty the King, will you have the good kindness to accompany me into another room."

"I am at your service, mounseer," said the Englishman. "I will go with you willingly. It will give one who carries the blood of kings under his doublet a great deal of pleasure to escape out of this kennel in which his cousin of France keeps his puppy dogs."

Speaking thus, our leader threw a glance around him of great effrontery, which ministered further to the amazement of those who were present. He then followed this high officer of the court into another room. The Count of Nullepart and myself accompanied him.

Here we found ourselves alone, which, considering Sir Richard Pendragon's present humour, I cannot help thinking was a fortunate circumstance.

The chamberlain withdrew in order to convey our business to his royal master. No sooner had he done so than the Count of Nullepart broke forth into an outburst of inextinguishable laughter.

Sir Richard Pendragon viewed the Count of Nullepart's demeanour with a grave disdain. Further, he assured me privily, that "a man's nation could not hide itself when his foot was on his native soil. Mounseer Nullepart was a good fellow enough, but there was no mistaking his nationality."

In so far as the Englishman deplored the Count of Nullepart's levity I was in accord with him. Yet, for my own part, having the sangre azul of Spain in my veins, which is apt to insist that a courtly bearing is beyond all things essential to him who would converse with the great of the earth, I could not help but regret the manner in which our leader had invaded the palace of the most Christian prince.

As we remained thus to await an audience of the King of France, I began to fear dreadfully lest the leader of our embassy should mislay his manners before the Sovereign. The walls of the room were covered by mirrors; and as Sir Richard Pendragon stood before each of them in turn, preening himself like a bird of bright plumage, now with his bonnet on his head to judge the appearance of his Persian cockado, now with it off to see how he seemed without it, I grew sensible of a concern for the affronts our singular leader was like to put upon the Father of his People.

Six times Sir Richard Pendragon put his bonnet on before the mirrors, and six times he took it off again. He then sighed deeply, and said, "Prithee, good Miguel, in how far would you consider that Spain is a civilized nation?"

"Good Sir Richard Pendragon," I said, "surely your question asks not an answer. From the time of the Cid, as all the world knows, Spain has been the most civilized country on the face of the earth."

"I understand that perfectly, good Don," said Sir Richard Pendragon. "But making abatement for your native peninsularity, which in its due place and season is commendable, I would ask you whether, in my capacity of plenipotentiary-extraordinaire to a Spanish princess, I might come before the King of France wearing my bonnet, because I find this Persian cockado sets off my countenance in a very proper, majestical, modish, yet not foppish manner."

"Good Sir Richard Pendragon," I answered, "I do conceive that one who has the sangre azul of Spain in his veins may be allowed to answer your question judicially. Nothing could less beseem a representative of Spanish nobility than that wearing his bonnet he should enter the presence of a Christian sovereign."

This opinion caused Sir Richard's face to fall.

"It could be done by the ambassador of the Ottoman Empire," said he, "and the Turks are religious men. The representatives of Morocco could do it also, and the Moors are a very ancient people. And of course at Teheran it is the mode.

And if this Louis, this frog-eating French fellow, were mine old gossip Maximilian, whose kingdom is four times the size of France, the thing could be done so easily as you might count nine."

"Good Sir Richard Pendragon," I said gravely, "this act which you contemplate would be a blot upon the fair fame of Spain, of which these many years we have been so jealous."

Now I think my demeanour must have convinced Sir Richard Pendragon that my opinion was a just one, had not the Count of Nullepart, who had laid aside his mirth to listen to our conversation, interposed an opinion of his own. And that opinion, as I grieve to inform the gentle reader, was far from agreeing with the one I myself had given.

"Good Sir Richard Pendragon," said the Count of Nullepart in his most subtle and melodious accent, "it seems to my mind that these parallels you have been learned enough to adduce from Constantinople, Tangier, Teheran, and other centres of light are extremely pregnant to this embassy. If the measure of civilization in such places—and as you say, in those countries religion is not unknown—would permit the diplomatic body to appear bonneted à la Persie before a crowned Christian prince, it seems to me that you have furnished the clearest reason why you should conform to their usage."

"You speak well, mounseer, you speak well," said Sir Richard Pendragon with a complacent air.

"My good friends," said I, "I deplore the fact that these are not my views. Let me assure you

that the act you contemplate would be far from the dignity of Spain."

The Count of Nullepart, observing that I was exercised upon the subject, was good enough to make a proviso.

"Perchance, good Sir Richard," said he, "there is one formality we should observe if we would enter the presence of majesty bonneted à la Persie. We owe it to the dignity of France, I think, that we follow the practice of Mohammedan countries. If we wear our bonnets, it seems to me that we must remove our shoes."

To this proposal Sir Richard Pendragon seemed loth to assent. The Count of Nullepart, with great courtesy, appealed to my judgment. Now I, although extremely reluctant to appear in my bonnet before a great Christian sovereign, yet felt that if such a course was imperative, the Count of Nullepart's suggestion came from a quarter where breeding was admired. So familiar was he with the temper of courts, and so firmly did he adhere to the opinion that the removal of our shoes was necessary if the leader of our embassy was determined to wear his bonnet, that I gave my sanction to this proposal. But it was not until we had had further controversy upon the subject that Sir Richard Pendragon, still declining to remove his bonnet, at last consented to take off his shoes.

"Perhaps," said he, as he reluctantly removed them, "it will give France a better notion of our breeding."

However, when he had discarded them and he

came to survey their buckles, he grew discomposed in his mind. He had purchased them expressly that morning, and very handsome and imposing did they look.

"By my good soul," he said, "I am not at all clear that silver buckles do not make a better appearance than Persian cockadoes in the palaces of the West."

"It is a mere matter of taste, my dear Sir Richard," said the Count of Nullepart, smiling.

Yet the count had already followed the example of his leader, having put on his bonnet and having doffed his shoes. I also had deemed it necessary to do the same.

Therefore, when the grave French nobleman presently returned to say that the most Christian King would see us in audience, he found us seated in somewhat remarkable case.

CHAPTER XXVII.

OF OUR AUDIENCE OF THE MOST CHRISTIAN KING.

I THINK the Marquis de Contreville-Lancy—that, as we afterwards learned, was the name of this gentleman—had some little surprise when he saw in what fashion we were disposed for our audience of the King, his master. Yet, if surprised he was, and I think, good reader, in this instance a little of such an eminently natural feeling is to be par-

doned, he was far too grave and serious a nobleman to display it unduly. Yet I feel sure he viewed our appearance not without displeasure, and I believe it gave as high a relief to his feelings as it did to my own, when Sir Richard Pendragon coming to stand up, exclaimed, "This French marble is plaguy cold to the feet. Upon my good soul! it is a kind of distemper to buy a pair of shoes tricked with silver and then to walk barefoot before the king's majesty."

"All the same, good Sir Richard," said the Count of Nullepart, "it is well known that the etiquette of the French court is very nice."

In consequence of Sir Richard Pendragon's new qualms, the Marquis de Contreville-Lancy was taken into our counsels. And I feel bound to state that the reference to this dignified nobleman proved highly fortunate. He persuaded Sir Richard Pendragon not only to don his shoes, but also to doff his bonnet. For he declared that any other proceeding would gravely imperil our embassy.

This piece of whimsicality being thus happily adjusted, we repaired in a wholly civilized mode to the presence of the first prince of the age. I cannot tell you, reader, what were my feelings when for the first time in my life, and at a period when I had barely attained to the estate of manhood, I found myself within a few paces of so august a personage.

Upon first coming into the presence of King Louis I could observe very little, for a most singular haze rose before my eyes. When afterwards I came to mention this phenomenon to the learned

Count of Nullepart, he said that all who entered the presence of majesty were thus afflicted. It was a kind of exhalation, he said, which embodied their divinity. At the time, however, I was not aware of this interesting fact in natural philosophy. I only knew that there was nothing in the apartment that I could descry at all clearly, yet, understanding by a kind of instinct that my two companions were bowing low, I followed their example.

When at last I could see the King more fully he was conversing with Sir Richard Pendragon. The remarkable man who had come to lead our embassy had the seemliness to conduct himself with a most polite civility, of which I had scarcely suspected him to be capable. After humbly saluting the hand of the monarch, he paid King Louis some highly flattering addresses, and sinking to one knee —an act of courtly homage that was so well performed that it must have been the fruit of long practice—presented to the King the cartel of our mistress.

While one of his ministers read the terms of the reference aloud to the King, who, of course, was too great a personage to read it himself, I was able to muster my wits sufficiently to mark the most Christian prince. And, good reader, you will doubtless call in question the veracity of my two eyes when I assert that the French King Louis was a small, wizened, pock-marked man, with a face, as became the embodiment of his nation, that was not unlike a frog's. His hair was red in colour; there was a marked cast in his right eye;

the lids were twisted and puckered in a most curious manner; his insignificant person and particularly his puny hands were twitching constantly; his voice was not agreeable; and I could not decide whether the colour of his eyes was brown or grey or dark green—the Count of Nullepart inclined to the latter opinion, Sir Richard Pendragon to the former—yet, good reader, I assure you solemnly that, notwithstanding all these disabilities, the French sovereign was every inch a prince.

There were three or four of the King's ministers present in the room, with ruffs about their necks and short pointed beards. When they had read madam's communication, the King seemed puzzled to know who his correspondent might be. It appeared that he had not the faintest recollection of his aunt. And, as I conceived, somewhat singularly, the ruler of France showed a livelier concern for this relationship than for the demand that we had come to make upon his friendship.

At the command of the King an enormous genealogical chart was brought into the room. Being laid upon the table, it provoked the greatest curiosity. One and all scrutinized it with diligence, King Louis with an even shrewder regard than the rest. And presently he was able to convince himself that in Spain there dwelt an aunt of his of whom he had neither seen nor heard.

The King having duly established their kinship, proceeded to ply Sir Richard Pendragon with some pertinent questions, which the Englishman answered in the grave manner of a true ambassador.

"A proud and royal lady, good your majesty," said Sir Richard Pendragon, "every inch a queen. She hath loyal and shrewd advisers, good your majesty, among them these famous gentlemen and one who shall be nameless."

The King desired that the Count of Nullepart and myself should be presented to him. Sir Richard Pendragon undertook this office. With an air of magnificence that nought could surpass he recited our titles and our merit; and had we discovered anything to be lacking in the character he gave us we must have been ambitious men. It seemed that the most noble the Marquis of Fulano was the most accomplished minister in Spain; while I was a great lord, and, in spite of my tender years, by no means the least of its captains.

"And may I assure you, sire," said this extraordinary envoy, "the most excellent queen's majesty hath a standing army of not less than forty thousand men-at-arms."

This revelation of the puissance of our mistress was not without its effect upon the King and his ministers. At first they seemed to extend only a languid interest to our business, but the manner in which Sir Richard Pendragon conducted it began to stimulate their attention.

Indeed, it must have taken very cold-blooded statesmen not to derive interest from Sir Richard Pendragon's presentment of the case. Taking the genealogical chart as a kind of map of Spain, with one finger he indicated the stronghold of the King of Castile, at fifty leagues' distance from Toledo,

and with another traced his broad dominion upon which our mistress was already marching with forty thousand men-at-arms. He declared that it was the Countess Sylvia's plan to draw the King of Castile out of his stronghold by falling upon and laying waste his unprotected lands; and then, while the Castilian was fully engaged in defending his own, she proposed that an army of her royal nephew's should come up in the rear—quite unexpectedly, for the nature of this present mission was known to none—enter the unprotected stronghold of the former enemy of King Louis, and seize it for France.

With such conviction and enthusiasm did Sir Richard Pendragon expound a plan of war that was entirely of his own invention, that King Louis, who at first had not listened very closely to a proposal that was outside the sphere of his politics, began to nod his head in approval. And finally the King of France was moved to hold animated converse with his ministers.

After they had spoken together for some while, one of these gentlemen directed Sir Richard Pendragon's attention to the fact that although ten thousand was the number of soldiers that he asked for, according to the tenor of madam's petition the number was no more than four thousand. Thereupon Sir Richard Pendragon produced a large pair of horn spectacles, adjusted them gravely, and after scrutinizing the parchment very carefully, although there is reason to believe that madam's ambassador was able to read a little of the Spanish tongue, he

gave it as his opinion that the four thousand was an undoubted error of the scrivener's, inasmuch—and he spoke very truly in this particular—that the author of the proposal was himself.

This assurance being given, the King and his ministers again conferred ; and presently the audience was terminated by his Majesty saying that this affair was of such moment that he desired twenty-four hours in which to sit in council with his advisers. The King then took leave of us, yet with a courteous request that the envoys of his respected aunt —who, according to Sir Richard Pendragon, was a learned and devout lady of mature years—should be lodged in the palace during their stay at Paris, and further, that they should engage themselves to dine with him that evening.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

OF FURTHER PASSAGES IN THE LOUVRE AT PARIS.

When madam's three envoys came to find themselves in the private apartments that had been given to them by the King of France, I had no words in which to express my amazement at Sir Richard Pendragon's audacity. When I remembered that the Countess Sylvia was scarcely more than a child, with a beggarly retinue of three hundred men-at-arms, who would be wholly incapable of holding the castle of Montesina against the Castilian host ; and when beside this dismal truth I set the

dazzling story by which Sir Richard Pendragon had cozened one of the first princes of his age, I did not know whether it was not the bounden duty of a caballero of Spain to repair to King Louis and confess the fact.

All the rest of that day this problem afflicted me sorely. In these circumstances my natural guide was the Count of Nullepart, who was an older head and a wiser; and one who, to judge by his conversation, was not unacquainted with the things that concern man's higher nature. But when I mentioned to him my perplexity, his only reply was to break out into laughter.

Finally, in my concern, I spoke of this matter to its author. He, with his court gravity still upon him, heard me out very patiently, and made answer with great solemnity.

"Most noble marquis," said he, "you must forgive the personal opinion of a good man, of a chief ornament of a shining age; but I do not think you would use these questions, marquis, had you a nicer familiarity with courts. Believe me, marquis, it is not the rule in such elevated places to observe that slavishness to the sober verities which at once betrays the mind of the provincial. I ask you, noble marquis, what kind of a figure should we have cut before the King's majesty had we merely acquainted him with the sober and common aspect of the case? Do you suppose the first prince of his age would have lodged madam's envoys in his palace —she who so recently has been whipped and put to bed by her old nurse? Do you think he would have

had his ministers attend him in privy council? Do you think that this evening we should have been bidden to attend an entertainment? Not so, noble marquis. Had it come to the ear of the King's majesty that the might of the neat little doxey was measured by three hundred men-at-arms and an old boarhound, in less than an hour we should have been sent packing out of the city. And, most noble marquis, let me perpend: one who hath the blood of kings under his doublet would be the last to hold this virtuous prince to contumely, for English Dickon and his friend the Sophy would, in these circumstances, have done the same."

"But, good Sir Richard Pendragon," said I, "my illustrious father has assured me that truth is always truth; that sober verity is sober verity equally in the king's palace, in the marts of the middling, or in the pestilent hovels of the poor."

"If this was your father's opinion, noble marquis," said the Englishman, "it is wonderful that he was able to make you a gift of even ten crowns at his burial. Where can you and he have dwelt, noble marquis, not to be aware that the truth hath more than one countenance? To the vulgar truth hath one aspect, to the learned it hath an hundred aspects. That which a private person such as yourself might consider an army, a veritable potentate might deride as unworthy of his regard. Permit me, noble marquis, to speak a word in your ear. Do not, I pray you, ever mention three hundred men-at-arms to the King of France."

However, during the remainder of that day this

matter continued to run much in my thoughts. And this was in despite of Sir Richard's mode of reasoning, which I lacked the subtlety of mind to seize. Yet I do not want for parts, I think. Philosophy has been current in my mother's family for at least an hundred years, and as I have said already in this history, her brother Nicholas was a clerk of Salamanca, and wore a purple gown. In the depth of my perplexity I turned again to the Count of Nullepart, whom, I am sure, nature had designed to be my guide. But when I mentioned this subject to him for the second time, he sat down on a settle, placed both hands on his knees, and laughed in such an immoderate fashion that the tears rolled down his cheeks.

Be all this as it may, we were lodged in the palace of the King, and that evening attended a great entertainment. There were ladies royal and beautiful; gallant and noble gentlemen, illustrious in war and the polite arts; also there was a noise of loud music.

In my condition of marquis—I knew not how to disclaim that degree without showing myself deficient in breeding — and honourable envoy to a princess, I was seated at the table of the King of France. Upon either hand were ladies of the blood-royal. If I may venture to be quite candid in this matter—and if I am not my history will have no value, yet I hope such frankness will have no appearance of discourtesy to the household of a king—neither of these ladies was in the blush of youth, nor was she amazingly beautiful. On the score of their wit

perhaps I may be excused from speaking ; for as they had no Spanish and I had no French, our conversation was not so brilliant as some at the table.

Opposite to me sat the Count of Nullepart, or, as he was now called, the Marquis Fulano, a very singular title for a hidalgo of Spain. His circumstances appeared to be identical with my own. He also was encompassed by two royal princesses, one of whom had not a tooth—Heaven defend me for this candour !—and looked hardly a day less than ninety ; while the other had an unfortunate malformation of the shoulders and a pair of eyes which glittered like those of a goshawk. As the Count of Nullepart insisted on speaking a rustic Spanish in a guttural voice that was quite foreign to his natural one, and as these royal ladies confined themselves to their mother tongue, the Count of Nullepart's intercourse must have ranked next to my own. Yet, if the cheerful mirth of his countenance was a true index to his feelings upon the subject, his disappointment could not have galled him very deeply.

In the course of that evening it was freely rumoured that the Marquis Fulano was none other than a near kinsman—some said the second son—of the King of France. Indeed, the laughter that his appearance and behaviour excited, and yet the high respect that was paid to them on every hand, was such as could never have been extended to the idiosyncrasies of a private person. From that hour to this neither Sir Richard Pendragon nor myself has ever been able to win such an amazing admission from the Count of Nullepart. But as he has never

thought well in anywise to deny it, and as the demeanour of all at the French court was such as I have declared it to be, there is every reason to suppose that our comrade's true degree was of this exalted nature.

Sir Richard Pendragon was also in very singular case. Will you believe me, reader, when I inform you that this swaggerer, this maltreater of the truth, this robber of churches, this uncouth barbarian, had the King of France upon his left hand and the Queen upon his right? And so little was this ready-tongued adventurer abashed by the exalted position in which he found himself, that from the beginning of the meal he held the King in discourse, and handsomely retained the royal interest until it was concluded.

What it was that Sir Richard Pendragon found to say to the Father of his People I know not. But if his conversation was inspired by the same disrespect for the sober verities as had distinguished it earlier in the day, I doubt not that the King's majesty learned much that the wisest of his ministers had not dreamed that he should know.

Much of this mad Englishman's discourse was comprised of fantasy and comic tales. By the time he had consumed a liberal quantity of wine, which to a less commodious nature must have been a source of inconvenience, he kept the good King Louis in a perpetual state of laughter. It was the same with his royal consort. Indeed, grievous to relate, the Count of Nullepart subsequently made the accusation against Sir Richard Pendragon that

he was the only person of his acquaintancy at the French court who was capable of bringing the blush of modesty to the cheek of the Queen-Mother.

In despite of this, Sir Richard Pendragon had great success on that memorable evening; and I think he was the envy of more than one ambitious courtier who had spent his life in flattering princes. Certainly no man could have been in a situation to admire himself more, and certainly no man could have been better equipped by nature to render to himself that office.

Owing to the manner in which fortune had smiled that evening upon our leader, he awaited the King's decision with the greatest complacency. He assured the Count of Nullepart "that by the inner light of the mind he saw himself already at the head of those ten thousand Gauls." And further, having once seen himself in the place of a great captain, by an additional process of the imagination which I believe is a curious quality in which his countrymen are highly gifted, he saw himself as the future king of the Spains.

After his success at the King's board, Sir Richard invaded my sleeping-chamber that night in the palace, and regaled me until the dawn with the bright future that lay before us. Once the King of France gave over ten thousand men to his leadership, he showed in what manner he, Richard Pendragon, knight of England, with the blood of kings under his doublet, would crush the proud Castilian by the virtue of deep strategy and the power of the understanding.

About the hour the golden daylight had begun

to stream through the shutters of our royal lodging, the English giant had had himself crowned by the Archbishop of Seville; he had led to the altar the Countess Sylvia, who, he said, after due consideration of the merits of Betty Tucker, his accomplished countrywoman, was in some ways the more fitted to be the royal consort if he were called to the Spanish monarchy; and further, he had conferred great place in his household upon the Count of Nullepart and myself, being good enough to declare that we could be trusted to fill it worthily.

Later in the morning, however, when we repaired to the audience-chamber to receive the King's decision, these rosy visions did not appear so bright. For we came upon another aspect of the great King Louis. Although not indisposed to lend ten thousand men to his Spanish aunt upon terms thereafter to be mentioned, because it seemed we had come in a season when his cousins of Navarre and Burgundy were behaving reasonably, yet there was a condition to observe; and this was the key to the negotiation. The sum of one hundred thousand crowns in gold must be lodged in the King's treasure chest ere a single soldier of France found his way across the Pyrenees.

Such a condition had not been foreseen by Sir Richard Pendragon's diplomacy. The blow to him was sore; yet he contrived to dissemble his chagrin skilfully, and with all the cunning imaginable strove to purchase the aid of France upon lighter terms. In despite, however, of Sir Richard Pendragon's wiles, his flatteries, and the rosy hues in

which he painted the future, King Louis remained obdurate. In fact, in this matter the first prince of his age discovered a side to his character for which only a sour spirit could have been prepared. As Sir Richard Pendragon declared subsequently, "he haggled like a Fleming." He declined to abate a penny of emolument for the proposed service to his Spanish aunt. And not only this, but in regard to such affairs as leadership, conduct of the troops in the field, and division of the spoil, he rendered it clear to us that we were sadly out of our reckoning.

Sir Richard Pendragon spent two hours in council with King Louis and his advisers. He then bade them farewell in no very amiable humour. It was abundantly clear that our embassy had failed completely. Even one of the Englishman's ingenuity could devise no means of surmounting the heavy demands of this covetous prince.

Straightway we left the palace. It was then our chief desire to set a goodly number of leagues between us and this unlucky city of Paris. For the period of twenty-four hours I think I have never seen a man in such high dudgeon, so out of humour with all the world save himself, as was our redoubtable leader. So sanguine had been his visions that he had almost come to feel the rim of the Spanish crown upon his forehead. Alas for his dreams! He now abused King Louis for "a poor-blooded French dog that was fitter to be a grocer, a purveyor of hog's lard and garlic, than a true prince whose emoluments should have been

one half of a fair dominion—he would have been agreeable to allow the rascal one half of the kingdom—had he not borne himself like a Fleming."

As we turned our horses towards the Spanish frontier, seldom have I heard such bitter curses. Yet, even making abatement for Sir Richard's sanguine temper, I marvelled that one of such wisdom as this Englishman should have built such towering hopes upon such a poor foundation. As I was fain to remark to the Count of Nullepart, "How could we suppose that such as the King of France would give us an easy bargain? And how could one so accomplished in the world as Sir Richard Pendragon deceive himself so sorely upon such a subject?"

To this the Count of Nullepart rejoined, "My dear friend, a high poetic temper puts a continual affront upon its possessor. This wonderful Englishman travels three continents, ordering his ideas not by the light of reason but by the light of fantasy. He takes no heed of those obstacles which pedestrian minds cannot surmount. And although it is true that on occasion he knocks his brains against them with no better reward than a broken pate, yet through the world he goes, assailing them with the winged heels of his imagination, so that, by my faith, he is prone to overleap these barriers altogether. And I conceive, my dear, that you and I, who are his humble followers, who, moving after him at a respectful distance, are yet sworn to serve his whims, will be not a little beguiled—we who are amateurs of the human heart—to observe into what courses his fantasy will presently be leading him."

In this the Count of Nullepart spoke correctly. We awaited the further exploits of our remarkable leader with the highest curiosity.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SIR RICHARD PENDRAGON'S STRATEGY.

It was not until we were clear of the soil of France that the Englishman was able to shake off his resentment against King Louis, "the pock-marked Flemish grocer," as he dubbed him. Then it was that in some mysterious manner his sanguine temper came again to his aid. I cannot remember one who came near this Englishman in that power of self-belief which renders a man in his own esteem not less than the peer of nature.

In the lustre of his new designs he began to forget his cross in fortune. Precisely what these were we had yet to discover; yet, as we returned into my fair native country, it was clear that the mind of Sir Richard Pendragon was moved by some new ambition. On several occasions he brought his horse to a stand in order that he might proudly survey the distant hills. And having done this he would cause them to re-echo with his great baying laughter.

"O Dickon, Dickon!" he roared, "thou who art of the seed of that Uthyr that was Arthur's sire, and that was german-cousin to Giant Cormoran

that gorged upon Christian children in his Cornish fastness, what an inveterately nimble humour thou hast, thou ruby-coloured one, with thy lean look and thy high integrity!"

Then, having thus spoken, he would beat his thigh with his fist in such wise as to provoke his curious beast Melanto to strive furiously to throw him.

To the Count of Nullepart and myself the behaviour of this mad Englishman grew ever more mysterious. Every night he declared to us "that nothing forced the head veins like a cross in fortune." And then very gravely he would ask "whether the poltroonery of that French poulter's hare had in any wise daunted our faith in the quality of king's blood, because let it not be forgotten that it was borne by a good mother's son who walked modestly before the nations."

For my own part, being of the northern provinces, which have the most penetration of any district of Spain, I must confess that my faith in Sir Richard Pendragon had been greatly impaired by the outcome of our journey to Paris. Still, it was far from my intention to suggest this to one who esteemed that personage so highly.

Therefore I still professed my allegiance, yet, I am afraid, in a lukewarm manner. The Count of Nullepart, however, assured our leader, with every appearance of gravity, that his faith in his strategy was unshaken. Indeed, he pledged himself to embrace whatever further courses he might devise.

Now, good reader, as you are to learn, the Count

of Nullepart's resolve was to be tried sorely. And I, who had expressed no such confidence in our singular commander, was also to be put grievously to the test.

It was not at once that Sir Richard Pendragon's new design was unfolded to us. In fact, it might be said that it was not disclosed until it had been actually and marvellously wrought.

At first, in spite of the change in the Englishman's demeanour, I am bound to confess that I was very disconsolate when we returned into Spain. It is true that Sir Richard was again as proud, sanguine, and warlike as if he were riding at the head of ten thousand of King Louis's men-at-arms, yet not for an instant could I forget that he went without attendance. I was extremely mindful of our failure, the more particularly as the Countess Sylvia was in such sore need of the succour we could not bring. Also I was fearful of the reception we were like to meet with at the doomed castle of Montesina.

When I mentioned these fears to the Count of Nullepart he expressed the conviction that all would be well. Indeed he declared that his faith was unshaken in our incomparable leader. In this I felt that he mocked me. Therefore I was fain to mention to Sir Richard Pendragon the bitter pass in which we stood; whereupon he, in the strangest fashion conceivable, stopped his horse in the middle of a hilly district, and roared until it seemed that the whole earth was trembling with the bolts of Jupiter.

"Why, you poor soul," he cried, "would you suppose that we, who went to France to procure an army, return to the young queen's majesty with nothing in our hands?"

"Good Sir Richard Pendragon," said I, "in sober verity that is indeed the case."

"What a distemper is this, my son," said the Englishman, "that you should harbour such a thought? Do you not know, springald youth, that no person of my nation ever returns from a foreign country with nothing in his hands?"

"Good Sir Richard Pendragon," I rejoined, "I am afraid I fail in this instance to appreciate in what particular our hands are occupied."

"Doubtless your own are empty, vain springald youth, because, like all of your nation, your mind is barren."

There was little satisfaction to be gained from such discourse as this. If ever three servants were returning empty-handed to their mistress, surely we were those three. And when I thought of the Castilian, who no doubt was already besieging her castle with his great host, and I remembered her unbending spirit, which had yet no more than three hundred lieges to sustain it, my very dreams were poisoned as I lay asleep, and I could have wept that we had borne such unfruitful service.

In my failure to reconcile Sir Richard Pendragon's speeches and conduct with the indisputable facts of the case, I was fain to consider him unhinged, not in a few particulars, but in all. I was moved to believe that his reverse at the hands of the French

sovereign had overthrown entirely a mind that could have never been very secure.

When we came near to the borders of Castile and made inquiry of innkeepers and those who dwelt in market towns, our ears were assailed with wars and the rumours thereof. And soon it became clear to us, as we rode with all speed towards Montesina, that that which had been predicted had come to pass. The King of Castile, said the public voice, had moved out with a great host, was already lying before the walls of the recalcitrant Duke of Montesina, and had sworn on the bones of the Cid that he would not withdraw until they were razed to the earth, and he had taken the whole of the duke's dominion for his own possession.

The Count of Nullepart, who, now that he was again upon Spanish territory, had doffed his beard and resumed his charming manners, seemed affected only to cheerfulness by these tidings. He was content, he said, to follow in the wake of his friends, and should be curious to learn the courses into which their strategy would lead him. Sir Richard Pendragon also upon hearing the news was affected to pleasantness. A smile of satisfaction spread over his countenance, and he expressed the hope that misfortune would not wait too soon upon madam and her defenders. I, however, had nothing of this disposition. Upon my life, I could not see anything in these tidings save darkness and disaster. In my view the failure of our embassy was the total failure of our hopes. Three hundred men-at-arms

would be powerless to cope with a great army, even if they had this English giant to command them.

Indeed, at this season I was more than ever persuaded that the Englishman was unhinged. Yet when I expressed this opinion to the Count of Nullepart he merely laughed heartily. And if I ventured to address any kind of remonstrance to Sir Richard Pendragon he would deride me in such terms that I was obliged to hold my peace.

No sooner had we come into Castile, the enemy's kingdom, than what I was forced to regard as Sir Richard's distemper took a more palpable form. At a small rustic place, a three days' journey from France, he insisted that we should assume the guise of peasants, and should consign our horses to the keeping of the proprietor of the local venta.

To my astonishment, he himself set the example we were to copy. Doffing his magnificent canary-coloured doublet and all the rest of the bedizenments he had acquired at Paris, even to the cockado in his bonnet, he habited himself entirely in the garb of a peasant, so that, making allowance for his bulk and his stature, I doubt whether "the sainted lady his mother" would have known him.

By what means he had contrived such a disguise, and whence he had obtained it we were unable to learn. In some places it was mightily close to the skin; in others it was burst open; and further he

had sought out similar attire for the Count of Nullepart and myself.

Perhaps it were well to state that on my own part I had no intention to submit to this unseemliness, because I could only regard the whole matter as a distemper of the brain. Yet when, to my great surprise, I saw the worshipful Count of Nullepart tricked out in this vulgar garb, with his handsome face and shapely limbs emerging out of the rude clothes of a clown, I was obliged to yield my dignity, since, whatever the whimsicality of my companions, my youth rendered me no more than a cadet in the service I had embraced. All the same, nothing could have exceeded the disgust with which I doffed my fine clothes from Paris, which were so admirably proper to the figure of a gentleman, and exchanged them for the coarsest and most ill-fitting suit in which it has ever been my lot to invest my person.

I was equally reluctant to part with Babieca, my honest horse. I mentioned to my friends the distress such an act would cause me, whereon it appeared that Sir Richard Pendragon shared these feelings in the matter of his singular beast Melanto, and the Count of Nullepart partook of them also in respect of his palfrey that was called Monsieur. Therefore by the address of these two strange persons, who certainly in this particular did not appear to be so whimsical as they were in others, the keeper of the venta was persuaded to hold them in his stable against the time when we should send for them again.

Doubtless it were well to state that the landlord of the venta was hardly a free agent in regard to the horses. Sir Richard Pendragon threatened him with such atrocious penalties if the three animals were to go amiss within the next six months, even as to a single nail of their shoes or a minor hair of their tails, that the cheeks of the poor man were blanched with terror.

It was not until we had become privy to further whims of the Englishman's brain that we got upon our road. For early in the morning as we were about to go forth, a cart used for the conveyance of water was seen to be standing at the inn door. Skins hung from its sides, and it was drawn by four sturdy mules. No water was contained in the cart, but in lieu of it were three long poles such as are affected upon a journey by the country people. Sir Richard gave one of these staves to each of us, took one himself, and starting the mules upon their road, led them out of the town in the direction of Toledo.

To all my inquiries as to what possible use there could be for an empty water-cart and four sturdy mules I received the most unsatisfactory answers. The Count of Nullepart still professed himself as wholly in the hands of his commander. And he assured me solemnly that his experience of Sir Richard Pendragon had taught him that whatever were the actions of that singular man they were the fruits of a rare intelligence and were greatly to be admired by those who had reverence for the things of the mind.

As you will conceive, good reader, to this flattery Sir Richard Pendragon—trudging through the dust and the mire with his long pole in true peasant fashion, and wearing a great slouch hat and brass rings in his ears, so that he looked more than ever like a robber, and continually exhorting his four mules with barbarous oaths—gave an assent that was most ready and gracious. He took occasion to pay the Count of Nullepart a compliment of his own upon the power of his philosophy and his old-fashioned respect for high intelligence, "the which he was sore to observe in these days did not always obtain with springald youth." And the courteous gravity with which this English barbarian assured the Count of Nullepart that he loved him for his liberal opinions made me furious.

For could anything have been more unseemly than that we three persons of birth and high breeding — in such a description Sir Richard Pendragon is included by courtesy—should be pursuing the highways of Spain in the company of a water-cart drawn by four mules and wearing the rudest attire to be seen out of Galicia. Yet, as we moved through the unfrequented country places at the rate of one league an hour, there were some advantages at least to be taken from this fashion of progress. We needed not to keep a watch for robbers, since they were not likely to trouble three peasants who themselves had the appearance of bandits. Neither had we need to fear falling in with the army of Castile, because none could have discerned that three prominent

servants of the King's enemy were hidden in such wretched guise. Again, neither was there to be suspected in the homely and rustical figure of a water-carrier the accomplished robber of churches.

Although such immunity seemed a high price to pay, for its penalties still remained many and grievous, it presently began to appear that some kind of a design was lurking in it. For in the course of a week's painful journeying, and as we moved slowly from place to place, I seemed to discern that our leader was not so much unhinged as I had feared.

Howbeit, to all my searching after that which lay in his mind, he would only answer me with a droll mockery which he seemed greatly to relish. Still, ever to allow a due to the devil, as we came nearer to Toledo he showed no lack of that soldierly vigilance that always distinguished him when he took the road. He was very precise and yet very cunning as to the inquiries he made in regard to the disposition of the forces of Castile.

We proceeded very warily as we approached the scene of King John's campaign; and thereby contrived to glean some information of what was toward. All who have seen the famous castle of Montesina will not need to be told that it is perhaps in the most invincible situation of any fortress in Spain, for it stands upon a high and impregnable rock. Although it was well known to the Countess Sylvia's ruthless foe that at this time she had no more than three hundred men-at-arms with which to defend it, and that the duke,

her father, was afflicted with years, he yet deemed it wiser to gain his will by what in the language of war is called a siege, rather than to win the fortress by open assault at the point of the sword. The Castilian was a crafty prince and a covetous.

It was no small satisfaction to Sir Richard Pendragon to learn that King John, instead of enforcing the garrison, was content to invest the castle of Montesina; and in order to starve it into surrender had sat down before its walls. Yet it is no more than just to the King to mention that before taking this course he had already made one assault upon the rock, and had been repulsed with the loss of an hundred men.

This we learned as one night we unharnessed our mules at a posada, less than a day's journey from Toledo. Scarce had Sir Richard Pendragon received this information than he beat his stave on the water-cart and vowed that high heaven was smiling upon our enterprise. Indeed he declared that the victory was already in our hands. It was vain for me to seek an interpretation of this dark saying; yet by now I was determined to accept all that was urged by this formidable character, whom I had come to regard either as one of the wildest hare-brains of the age or one of its foremost intelligences.

CHAPTER XXX.

OF OUR ADVENTURES AMONG THE CASTILIAN HOST.

I HAVE deemed it proper in the narration of that which follows to show my own feelings precisely as they afflicted me at the time, and not as they came to be modified by the strange things that happened. In the end it was given to me to learn that Sir Richard Pendragon, so far from being a hare-brain, was a very deep and masterful schemer. But in so far as his designs passed beyond my comprehension at the period of which I now treat, I have deemed it right not to anticipate that final tribute which it will be necessary to pay to his character in the appointed time and season.

On setting out that morning from the posada, at Sir Richard's behest we filled the cart and the skins with water and turned the heads of our mules in the direction of the King of Castile's army. I yielded to these dispositions because, having come so far and having already obeyed in many things, I felt there was no other course to be taken; yet it was rather with the sense of being in a dream that I awaited the manifestation of this new extravagance. What fantasy was this that possessed our comrade? What new disorder of the mind had come upon him?

As towards evening we entered the lines of the Castilian army it ran in my heart to revile the

Count of Nullepart bitterly. It had come upon me that he had permitted the Englishman to betray our embassy. For trusting Sir Richard Pendragon so little it seemed to me that here was his clear design. Yet a moment's reflection showed that if the Englishman was come to betray a mission that had failed so lamentably it would profit him not at all. He must certainly lose his life; and further, the means he had taken to accomplish his act of treachery would hardly have been accompanied by this degree of masquerade.

When I heard the challenge, "Who goes there?" from the King's soldiers I felt a sudden chill upon my heart. Yet it was no more than a passing cowardice, the fruit of circumstances so gravely remarkable, for our leader was prompt to show himself as true to his trust and also as infinitely cunning.

"A friend," he answered with boldness and promptitude. He spoke in a rustical Spanish of the northern provinces; and then in the same dialect, in which his foreign brogue was most skilfully dissembled, he said that he had come to bring water to the army of the most gracious and sovereign prince.

"Well, then, my lord and knight, you are a thousand times welcome," said the sentinel in those terms of high courtesy in which we Spaniards, even in the humbler walks of life, excel the people of all other nations.

It was then that I understood that our leader had judged sagaciously, and that he had laid his

plot very deep. In the guise of water-sellers we could count on a welcome from an army in the field which had suffered the travail of a long day.

Sir Richard Pendragon gave the sentinel a drink of water out of a pannikin which was carried upon the back of the cart, and then after further civilities upon both sides and a few questions from our cunning leader upon the disposal of the King's host, we moved off into the darkness.

We made several leagues into the midst of the royal army, sustaining every challenge of the sentinels in a like manner. And finally when fatigue overcame us at last, we shared the hospitality of a number of soldiers who sat round a camp fire, who in exchange for our sweet and cool water gave us of their fare.

From these we learned much. We were informed that the surrender of the Castle of Montesina was expected to be an affair of three weeks. It was victualled for that period; and King John in his tenderness for his troops would not venture another assault upon the steep face of the rock. They confessed that a former attack had been met with a resolution they had not anticipated; and according to rumour, the boldness of the defenders had been inspired by a young female who was addicted to the practice of witchcraft.

However, to judge by their words, these soldiers were disposed to view the campaign with levity. They vowed it was a holiday task, and had the King's assurance for it. They could only marvel that one so aged and defenceless as the Duke of

Montesina should have had the presumption to resist them. And having no enemy to fear beyond the feeble creature immured upon a high rock behind stone walls, they now permitted themselves to dispense with much of that military precaution that warfare renders necessary.

It was in a measure due to this laxity that Sir Richard Pendragon was able to pursue his wonderful stratagem. This was so audacious that even now when I recall it, after the lapse of years, it seems to be the substance of a romantic tale. Certes it was born of a wild brain; yet, upon my life, it was prosecuted with such a sober courage and foresight, every detail was wrought with a skill so nice, every hap was safeguarded with a judgment so ripe and a wit so supple, that this mad plot has seemed almost to inhabit itself in the chaste light of reason.

A little after daybreak we three peasants with our water-cart left these friendly quarters; and at least one of us was unable to foresee the amazing things that were to befall ere he would again stretch his limbs in repose. Throughout the day we moved freely within the lines of the Castilian host, mixing with the soldiers upon familiar terms, offering them water in exchange for the nimble cuarto, and bantering them with rude jokes.

Then, as the sky grew dark again, we found ourselves within sight of the pavilion that had been set up for the use of the King's majesty. It was a handsome and imposing tent, formed of a striped cloth of blue and red, interwoven with the arms of

Castile and flying its three lions. An enclosure was formed around it with cords stretched upon poles; and before the entrance were three sentinels with drawn swords.

For some time we stood observing the royal arrangements. A throng of captains and courtiers was continually passing in and out of the King's tent. Then we drew off with our water-cart into a thicket that was near, fed the honest mules, and proceeded to eat some cheese made out of goats' milk with which we had provided ourselves.

About an hour after sundown the moon rose; and this was a circumstance that gave satisfaction to our leader.

"John Castilian," said he, "there is an old score that is due to thee by the hand of English Dickon that will not go much longer unrequited."

Saying this the English giant produced a stout piece of cord from the recesses of his jerkin, to which he added a short piece of iron, a cloth, and a huge bag woven of hemp, which had been tied to the tail of the water-cart. And swearing an oath in round London English, he waved these articles in the face of the good lady the moon.

It was near to midnight when we led the water-cart out of the thicket. We drove it to within a quarter of a league of that narrow path that winds sheerly upwards to the heights of Montesina, and thereby to the base of the walls of the duke's castle. Hitching the mules to a tree in a retired spot, we retraced our steps cautiously by the

light of the moon, until the outlines of the royal pavilion again took shape before us.

Not a sound disturbed the stillness of the night, for the King of Castile was no reveller. Doubtless his Majesty was already abed and lapped in slumber. At the door of his tent we were able to discern the drawn swords of the sentinels glancing to the moonlight as they mounted guard.

As we emerged from the shelter of the trees into the open meadow in which the pavilion was set, Sir Richard Pendragon, having taken the precaution to tie the bag round his middle, got down upon all fours and began to crawl like a great serpent through the grass towards the royal dwelling. And as the Count of Nullepart immediately got himself down upon his hands and knees also, and began to crawl after our leader, in order not to be out of the hunt, in whatever our quarry might consist, I was fain in these particulars to imitate their example.

Without causing a twig to break, we crept upon our hands and knees to the rear of the royal tent. And so artfully did we make our way that none perceived us when at last we came into its shadow, and actually lay with our shoulders against its canvas walls. And the three sentinels stood all unsuspecting in the moonlight, not fifty paces from us, yet hidden by the body of the pavilion.

Hardly had we come to lie thus than the Englishman drew his dagger and began to cut a large hole in the tent. And no sooner had I observed this to be his occupation than a kind of wonder-

ment overcame me, for at last I had come to discern the depth, the daring, and the subtlety of his invention.

CHAPTER XXXI.

OF AN ASTOUNDING EPISODE.

SCARCELY had Sir Richard Pendragon made a hole that was large enough to accommodate his great bulk when we heard the footsteps of the sentinel coming round to see that all was well. In a gentle voice, so that he might not wake the King, we heard him singing of his love, who, it seemed, was a flower of Andalucia. Yet just as he came up to us, with his sword gleaming in the moonlight, he tripped over Sir Richard Pendragon's outstretched leg and measured his length upon the earth. Before he could utter a cry, Sir Richard Pendragon had buried a knife in his heart.

"The dead don't speak," he whispered in a soft voice. He wiped the stains from his dagger upon the gaberdine of the man he had slain and replaced it in his jerkin.

In the next moment he had disappeared. In the fashion of a hugeous reptile he had crawled through the hole he had made into the interior of the King's pavilion. In the weary time of suspense that followed upon his absence the Count of Nullepart and myself lay in the grass listening to the beating of our hearts, and occasionally

exchanging a whisper to assure each other that we did not dream.

Beside us lay the dead soldier. At any instant his comrades were likely to be here to seek him. Had they come, I fear there would have been only one course open to us; although I think that both the Count of Nullepart and myself, being peacefully given, breathed a prayer that we should be spared the occasion to enter upon it.

It seemed an age, yet it could have been little more than five minutes, ere this suspense was terminated; and then, without a sound or a struggle from within the tent, a huge sack filled with a heavy substance was pushed through the hole.

The sight of the sack gave me a thrill I cannot describe. Something cold and sharp ran in my veins, and I nearly cried out. The next thing of which I was aware was the smiling and sinister countenance of the Englishman as he crept through the hole. Considering his bulk it was surprising that he could squeeze so noiselessly through such a little space. And in the same moment we heard a second sentinel coming round the pavilion.

I could hardly tell what happened, it was all so quick and horrible. In a dull bewilderment I watched Sir Richard Pendragon creep through the hole and then as the oncoming sentinel caught a view of the sack and the corpse of his fallen comrade he uttered a cry. But in so doing he spoke for the last time. With incredible swiftness and dexterity the unlucky wretch was slain.

"Now there is that third poor soul," said the

Englishman in a hushed voice. "Do you abide here, good friends, for honest Dickon, while that good mother's son relieves the poor soldier of his necessity."

Taking the dagger in his teeth, he began to crawl on his belly round the corner of the pavilion. While he was gone upon this errand, which, however ruthless in its character, was yet highly politic in its intention, both the Count of Nullepart and myself derived satisfaction from some tokens of animation which proceeded from the interior of the bag.

"Mon Dieu!" said the Count of Nullepart, laughing softly, "is it not well, my dear, that you and I are spared that abominable crime of regicide, which all the best authors are agreed doth stink so particularly in the nostrils of Heaven?"

"It is very well, most virtuous Count of Nullepart," said I, fetching a deep sigh of relief. Yet it was not given to me, reader, to embellish this solemn occasion with any great depth of philosophy. Pearls of wisdom have to be delved for in the inner nature; and at this moment, notwithstanding that it was great with destiny, there was not time to seek them, for hardly had I spoken ere Sir Richard Pendragon, standing upon his two legs and strutting like a turkey, and bearing his dagger in his right hand, came round the corner of the pavillion of the great Castilian prince.

In his good pleasure he waved the weapon above his head, and smiled down upon the Count of Nullepart and myself in a manner of the gravest amiability.

"Stand you now upon your ten toes, my dear and good brothers," said he. "Go ye not upon your bellies no more. Prithee walk no more like the crawling serpent, which is the symbol of deceit and devious courses. My dear and good brothers, I would have you proceed upon your flat feet under our chaste lady the moon. For that third poor soul is delivered of his need. 'A sweated as 'a felt the stroke, but by his eyes I could read that his passing was worthy."

Without more ado our formidable and ruthless captain laid his dagger into his jerkin and hoisted the huge sack upon his mighty shoulders. With incredibly swift strides, considering the burden that he bore, he was soon in the shelter of the thicket. The Count of Nullepart and I followed breathlessly, in a kind of amaze, and in a very little while we had come to the mules, which were tethered a short way off the winding track to Montesina.

It was discomposing to the sensibilities of men of birth such as the Count of Nullepart and myself that the bag and its contents were flung into the empty water-cart with somewhat more of violence than the circumstances called for. But I cannot believe that at this moment it was within our province to protest. Indeed, so far was the Count of Nullepart—who in some respects was apt to baffle me as completely as did Sir Richard Pendragon—from recording his displeasure that at first he was unable to proceed on his journey in the wake of the water-cart owing to the contortions of mirth into which he was thrown.

"Get up, little Neddies," said the English giant, giving the mules a lusty smack with the palm of his hand that started them at a jolt and a rattle along the road. Then, as he ran beside them, he rested one hand upon the bag and addressed its occupant in a humble voice.

"I trust your gracious Majesty rides pleasantly and in comfort," he said.

Now that we had this strange burden in our hands there was no immediate need for secrecy. We made good progress with the water-cart. That clumsy vehicle grunted and jolted along the deep-rutted track under the light of the moon; and Sir Richard Pendragon, running beside it cheerfully, in high good spirits, whistled lusty ditties and sang ribald peasant songs in indifferent Castilian. When we passed a sentinel or a camp-fire we exchanged friendly greetings, and asked the hour of the night. Once or twice, it is true, we had to submit to curses for disturbing the repose of some weary trooper. To these we returned an appropriate pleasantry.

The moon was still our friend by the time we came near to the mighty rock upon which was set the proud castle of Montesina. Here it was that our leader deemed other courses to be necessary. We were still within the lines of the King of Castile, for they extended to the base of the rock; also the lower portion of the steep winding track that led to the castle was in possession of his troops.

Now, one of our leader's wisdom did not need to be told that a water-cart would not be allowed to proceed to a garrison that was being starved

into surrender. Therefore, as soon as the frowning face of the rock began to loom in our path, a new and very grave problem was presented to his strategy. Yet it appeared that even of this matter he had already had the wit to take cognisance.

Half a league before we reached the entrance to the narrow winding road leading directly to the gates of the castle, upon which we must have been challenged, Sir Richard Pendragon turned the heads of the mules towards the meadows. Although these were invested by the King's soldiers, they appeared to be held very carelessly.

At the foot of the rocks was a wide and deep stream. When we had come to its margin Sir Richard unharnessed the four mules and turned them loose. They strayed away in all directions. He then removed the bag from the water-cart, and with our aid proceeded to destroy that clumsy and primitive vehicle. It was easy enough to lift the body from the wheels and break it in pieces. These were cast fragment by fragment into the stream, so that very soon the whole contrivance was completely vanished from the ken of man.

We bore the bag and its strange burden along the banks of the stream, until we were come presently to a goodly thicket of alder trees which grew at the water's edge. Taking care that we were not observed, we carried our burden into this concealment; and then the redoubtable Englishman, leaving us in this security to mount guard over our treasure, and bidding us not to show our faces in the open against his return, took his way towards

the castle. It was his hope that, under Providence, he might find his way into it by the further exercise of those ingenious arts in which none excelled him.

CHAPTER XXXII.

OF THE UNHAPPY SITUATION OF A GREAT PRINCE.

THE Count of Nullepart and myself, left thus in our hiding-place and in the charge of some highly valuable booty, were fain to hope very devoutly that our enemies might not come upon us during the absence of our leader.

When we fell to examine the bag, it was some satisfaction to our humane feelings to observe that three holes had been cut in the top of it to provide for the entrance of air. Even in a small matter it seemed that Sir Richard Pendragon could use his ingenious mind to a purpose.

We had not been long in contemplation of the bag ere we had a natural curiosity to view its contents, and, as I am willing to believe, a humane desire, as far as the circumstances would permit, to ease them of their pains. Therefore were we led to open the top of it, and to expose that which lay within to the light of day. And, good reader, it was with the liveliest trepidation that we did this; for it was hard to say in what case the contents were like to reveal themselves.

To give the royal personage within greater ease

of body, we propped the sack against an alder tree; and then, with much concern, exposed his head to the view. Our first sight of the King's majesty was a much dishevelled mass. A closer scrutiny showed the royal forehead to have one or two slight contusions; the undressed hair was hanging limply all about it; and a cloth tied with a cord had been thrust into the royal mouth.

The Count of Nullepart severed the cord with his dagger and withdrew the cloth, whereupon a pair of eyes came open in an empurpled face which also had a somewhat contused and swollen appearance, and a young prince was disclosed in the early prime of his manhood.

At first he gasped a little, since his situation had clearly been one of great rigour, and his mouth and tongue were very sore. After a moment of some little embarrassment on the side of both parties, the King of Castile was good enough to address us. He did so with evident difficulty, yet in the well-considered tones of one who uses few words and those to a point.

"I do not know," said the King of Castile, "to whom I am indebted for this consideration, but I beg you to believe I am grateful for it."

I suppose a famous and powerful prince could never have spoken from quite such a plight, yet his words were ordered with a simple courtesy that seemed entirely to efface the circumstances of the case. And no sooner had the Count of Nullepart heard the regal tones of the Castilian than first he bowed to the earth with all the grace of one who

has moved in courts, and then, quite suddenly, his addiction to laughter overcame him. Clapping his slender hands to his ribs he began to twist and writhe most immoderately.

King John of Castile, however, from the precincts of the sack continued to sustain the glances of the Count of Nullepart and myself with a simple and serious dignity that no amount of levity could abate; and indeed so kingly in his bearing was the royal occupant, bound hand and foot as he was and laid in a clump of alder trees, that I was fain to remove my hat and bow low before him, if only to prove that at least a hidalgo of the northern provinces was sensible of his condition.

The King's majesty received my homage with a smile of great courtesy. He then asked for a cup of water that he might moisten his lips.

"Sire," I assured him, "I shall esteem it the greatest honour of my existence to have the felicity of procuring you something to drink."

Yet, happy as I was to render this service, it was in no sense easy to accomplish, for there was never a drinking utensil for the King's convenience. I was fain to regret that we had the water-cart no longer and the skins with which it was furnished; but at the time we cast them away this present contingency had not been foreseen. Nevertheless, I went to the stream and dipped my hat in it, and was able to return with sufficient water to offer the King's majesty. And I think I have never seen a prince who was so thirsty. Yet doubtless his mouth and tongue were in sore case.

The King, having thus refreshed himself, thanked me very gravely and said, not at all harshly or unpleasantly, "I do not see that foreign robber, that gigantic and formidable English thief. Yet more than once in the night I heard his voice. Where is he? I would make him a compliment on the fortunate issue of his cunning."

Although the King smiled a little wryly as he said this, he still preserved the serious dignity of his mien.

Before I could make Sir Richard Pendragon's excuses for not being present, as I felt sure, notwithstanding his quiddity, the English giant, having the blood of kings under his doublet, would have wished me to do, there came through the soft and sweet morning airs a mighty commotion. There was shouting, the blowing of horns and trumpets, and then came the loud bark of a culverin.

"It would appear, your majesty," said the Count of Nullepart with his inimitable smiling air, which proceeding from one who wore the garb of a peasant seemed considerably to surprise the King, "that your worthy and loyal followers have just discovered that the royal tent has a hole in it."

"It would appear so, my friend," said the King imperturbably; "and they are a little late in their discovery. Yet I am not sure that I must blame them. It is my custom to allow myself a long eight hours for repose."

It was a source of regret to us that we had no food to offer our illustrious captive. However, we set the royal personality in as much ease as we

could devise, and for this consideration he was not ungrateful.

All through the long hours of the forenoon we had to keep a lively vigilance. The whole Castilian army was astir for miles about, searching for him who lay in durance in a bag in a grove of alders. From our concealment we could observe small parties of the King's soldiers walking hither and thither about the meadows. Sometimes they would approach quite near to us; and presently a body of them came down with ropes to drag the bed of the stream.

It was then, with the most civil apologies in the world, that we were fain to take up the cloth and the cord, and humbly to request the King to permit us to do our offices. Yet at the same time we assured him with every token of high respect that it would be our chief care to place as little hurt upon him as would consist with our unhappy duty.

However, as we made to put this further indignity upon the King, his calm fortitude seemed almost to give way. Turning his proud eyes upon us, he said in a voice that touched me to the soul, "My friends, if you will plunge a dagger into my heart, your names will be mentioned in heaven."

The Count of Nullepart and I conferred together.

"Upon my soul," said the Count of Nullepart, "I think the royal flesh should be a little respected."

"I am of that opinion also," said I; and then my Asturian prudence jogged my elbow. "All the same, worshipful, we are laid in a sore predicament. A live king is worth more than a dead one;

and if we leave his mouth unlocked, why, a single word might be our undoing."

"As you say, my dear Don Miguel," said the Count of Nullepart, "a single word may undo us; but, by my faith, if one so humble as myself may speak upon a high subject, I believe this to be a true prince, and I, for one, do not fear so accept a parole of a true prince."

Upon this speaking the blood of my ancestors mounted in my veins.

"Sir Count," said I, "I fear not either. You shall offer a parole to the King's majesty."

"The honour is yours, my dear Don Miguel."

"I do myself the honour of yielding to your years and merit, most worshipful Count of Nullepart."

But, in spite of his protests, the Count of Nullepart persisted smilingly in conferring the signal honour upon Miguel Jesus Maria de Sarda y Boegas of offering a parole to his Majesty the King of Castile.

"An it graciously please your Majesty," said I, "this grievous restraint shall be spared you, if you will deign to give your kingly word that neither by speech nor act will you reveal your gracious and royal presence unto your loyal subjects should they fare hither in quest of your gracious Majesty."

The King did not hesitate to bestow his thanks upon us for our favourable consideration, and duly pledged his sovereign word.

Now I know there are some who say, "Put not your faith in princes;" but from this time onwards it has ever been a source of sincere gratification that the Count of Nullepart and I thought well to reject

this adage. For, as you are to learn, the bare word of the King was about to be tried in the severest possible way; and it must always be written to his honour that, captive and enforced as he was, neither by word nor deed did he do violence to his covenant.

It happened about midday, as we were viewing with a continual anxiety the number and proximity of our foes, who were ever moving nearer and nearer towards us, that we observed a party of them making for our hiding-place. To escape their notice was impossible, as the clump of alder trees was too meagre to cover us closely; and had we moved out into the open meadows we must have been seen at once. Therefore in this dangerous pass we had a free recourse to our five wits.

First, we crept down to the stream and plucked several armfuls of the long rushes that grew there. Returning thence to our hiding-place we turned over the bag so that its princely burden was laid on its belly, with humble and profound apologies for the necessity, and having seated ourselves upon our illustrious captive—with as little hardship to him as we could contrive—proceeded to weave our rushes busily, as though we were a couple of peasants whose trade was the making of baskets.

When the soldiers came near we were to be seen labouring assiduously, while the bag upon which we were set was very fairly concealed. And when we observed them to be moving towards us in a straight line, so that further secrecy was out of the question, the Count of Nullepart lifted up his voice in a merry

lilt, lest it should appear that we had a desire to shirk them.

His song seemed to startle them, for as they came up, and they numbered near to a dozen, their captain asked me roughly what the devil we did there.

"We are pursuing our trade, gracious excellency," said the Count of Nullepart.

"What the devil is your trade?" said the captain of the soldiers.

"Our trade is the making of baskets, gracious excellency," said the Count of Nullepart.

"Let us hope then that you make better baskets than you do music, you loud rogues," said the captain; "and what the devil have you in the bundle there?"

No sooner had the captain of the soldiers made this inquiry than, to our profound alarm, he gave the bag a prod with the point of his sword; but the occupant thereof, upon whom we were seated, being in a very sooth a royal king, kept himself very close.

"Oh, the bag, your excellency!" said the Count of Nullepart, feigning a mighty carelessness. "The bag contains grasses all the way from Esparto for the making of baskets."

"Soh!" said the captain, laughing at that which he considered to be the Count of Nullepart's simplicity, "the bag contains grasses all the way from Esparto does it? I suppose it does not, by any chance," and the captain winked at his troopers, "contain the person of the King's majesty?"

"The person of the King's majesty!" cried the

Count of Nullepart, opening his eyes very wide. "Oh no, gracious excellency! it contains grasses all the way from Esparto. Perhaps your excellency would like to see them?"

So finely did the Count of Nullepart feign bewilderment that the soldiers began to laugh heartily at what they took for his simplicity. As if to convince them of the truth of his statement he made a pretence of trying to open the wrong end of the bag.

"You thick-witted clown," said the captain, "we will take your word for it that your precious bag holds not the King's majesty."

"Wherefore should it hold the King's majesty, excellency?" asked the Count of Nullepart in a very tolerable provincial Spanish.

"Have you not heard," said the captain, "that his blessed majesty has been murdered during the night, and three of his guard also; that the royal body has been stolen, and that we are scouring all the countryside to find it?"

"Gentle saints in heaven!" cried the Count of Nullepart, settling himself more firmly upon the bag, while its royal occupant refrained scrupulously from making the least motion.

"Why, then, brother Juan," said I to the Count of Nullepart, "surely that is what all this blowing of trumpets and horns and beating of drums and strange pillaloo that we have heard all the forenoon has been concerned with. The gracious King murdered! His body stolen! Good Virgin Mary, what an age in which to live!"

"God save us all!" said the Count of Nullepart.

"The gracious King murdered during the dark hours of the night! Did I not say to you, brother Pedro, that something was bound to occur? For did I not remark the sky last evening was blood red? And was I not so afeared at the sight of it that I crossed myself three times?"

"Well, at all events," said the captain of the soldiers contemptuously, "the wisdom of you clod-hoppers will not help us much. I have never seen a par of stupider gabies outside the madhouse at Zaragoza."

"O excellency," said the Count of Nullepart, counterfeiting the accent of tears very skilfully, "I pray you not to say that! Our virtuous mother was mightily proud of us in our infancy. We were bred together, and right nobly did we suck. But was it a foray, do you suppose, from the duke's castle that killed the King's majesty?"

"Likely enough, you zany," said the captain. "Although for that matter some there are who say it was the devil. For myself I can hardly credit it."

"Who is there else to compass such a deed?" said the Count of Nullepart in a hushed voice.

"Yes, who else, brother Juan?" said I, solemnly removing my hat.

Divers of the King's soldiers, witnessing our grave concern, appeared to come to the same mind. Several of them followed our example.

"Well, talking of the Devil," said the captain uneasily, "he was seen certainly last night by many in this neighbourhood."

"Good Virgin Mary!" exclaimed the Count of

Nullepart, "how poor Juan would have screamed had he seen his horns!"

"Yes, brother Juan, and poor Pedro also," said I; and in the depth of our feigning I felt myself to be turning pale.

"Some say he was without horns," said the captain.

"Then it can't have been the devil, excellency," said the Count of Nullepart. "All the world knows the Devil by his horns and his tail."

"It is said he came into our camp in the guise of a water-seller," said the captain. "And they say his voice was so dreadful that it could be heard at a distance of two leagues. In stature he was near to three yards; his face was so red that you could warm your hands at it, and he himself was seen to boil a kettle by holding it next to his nose."

"O Jesu!" said the Count of Nullepart. "Had Juan met him he ust have perished."

"It is easy to understand the redness of the setting sun," said I.

"That's true enough," said the captain of the soldiers, sighing heavily. "The sun was certainly red now you come to mention it. How sad it is that the King's courtiers did not heed such an omen! The right virtuous Duke of Manares is a wise and venerable minister; he at least should have known what was toward. By my soul we of Castile ought never to forgive him! But come, boobies." The captain, who owing to the heat of his own imagination, was now perspiring freely, turned to his men, the

majority of whom were standing bareheaded. "All the talking in the world will not recover the corpse of our noble sovereign. Let us help them to drag the stream. But I for one do not think we shall find anything there, because any child will tell you that the Devil will have nothing to do with cold water if he can possibly avoid it."

Without further parley the captain and his soldiers relieved us of their unwelcome presence. They went to join a company a short distance off, that was dragging large hooks along the bed of the stream. Thereupon we turned the bag over and placed the royal occupant in as much ease of person as we could devise. We paid this true prince all the homage of which we were capable, for could anything have been more regal than his devotion to his simple word of honour? But his Majesty could only reply to our humble yet heartfelt flatteries with a shake of the head and a sombre smile.

"Oh, you fools, you fools, you fools!" the King exclaimed. "Did ever monarch have such a parcel of boobies to serve him since the beginning of the world?"

Indeed, the King seemed to be truly distressed. Less, however, for his own indignities, which he could have terminated so easily had he not so regarded his honour, but because his followers were so unskilful.

As we continued in our hiding-place we were constantly threatened with further visits from the numerous parties of soldiers that were prowling around. Happily they did not come up to us.

As the day advanced the Count of Nullepart declared he was growing hungry, which was a feeling that I shared. I am afraid our captive must also have lain under this affliction, but there was no remedy for our strait. To obtain food was impossible without exposing ourselves to a danger we must not venture to incur.

In the course of the afternoon, the King, whose comfort had been consulted as far as ever the case would permit, and who had been plied freely with water for which he seemed grateful, fell asleep and so forgot his pains. Thereupon the Count of Nullepart and myself were fain to ask one another what had befallen our leader. And further, what must be the ultimate issue of our extraordinary pass.

Certes, Sir Richard Pendragon's entrance into the castle would be fraught with every difficulty and with the gravest peril. First, this broad and deep ditch beside which we lay would have to be crossed, and the only bridge that spanned it was held by the troops of Castile. Doubtless this bold man would take to the water rather than expose himself to his foes, who would be extremely unwilling to let anyone pass to the castle, no matter what the cunning of his pretexts.

Upon the assumption that Sir Richard Pendragon was able to swim the foss, his next course would be to climb the steep rocks until he came to the foot of these high and insurmountable walls that offered so stern a barrier to the forces of Castile. In what manner he would overcome these we could only conjecture. For the drawbridge

to be lowered it would be necessary for him to recommend himself to the notice of those within the castle without attracting the attention of the besiegers. Verily, the problem was a sore one. Yet so bold, cunning, and ingenious was the English giant that no array of perils was likely to daunt him. However, as we awaited events which we hardly dared to believe could come to pass, we were heartened by the knowledge of a singular and masterful genius. Had it at last met its overthrow? To such a question we had not the courage to foretell the answer.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A SORTIE FROM THE CASTLE.

As evening came on these speculations grew more grave. It was not pleasant to think of spending the night in the open meadow. And we were very hungry. There was also our captive to consider. Ease his bonds as we might, and render to him all the consideration that was within our power, he was yet in sore case.

Towards sundown, while we were still wondering in what sort we could bear the rigours to which we were likely to be exposed, a furious clamour was heard proceeding from the direction of the castle. Far and away the meadows had suddenly begun to echo with the beating of drums and the call to arms. We came out of our hiding-place, and going forth

into the open fields, were able to discern that the drawbridge of the castle had been lowered and that a body of mounted soldiers from the garrison was making a foray.

The purport of this was so plain to us that we could have cast our hats into the air for joy. It was clear that the English giant had found his way within those four walls, and now by a bold raid was about to bring us and our prize also within them.

Even as we stood at gaze, we thought we could detect far away through the mists of the evening the plumed bonnets of madam's defenders. Close by us straggling companies of the King's soldiery, unconnected two and threes, were running in no sort of order towards the lower bridge. This was but carelessly held by the arms of Castile, and now that an assault was to be delivered upon it, it was little likely to be repelled. Our enemies, having lost their king, seemed to lack discipline and leadership; and we did not doubt that the bold and masterful Sir Richard Pendragon, swollen with great achievement as he was, and a most cunning and accomplished warrior, would prevail in his design.

Such proved to be the case. We had not long to abide the issue. The oncoming darkness had not time to envelop us ere the meadows began to shake under a mighty thunder of hoofs; and Sir Richard Pendragon, mounted upon a splendid war-horse, the choicest in the stable of our mistress, and accompanied by a body of horsemen riding in admirable close order, came straight for our little clump of alder trees.

"A Pendragon! A Pendragon!" arose the great baying voice of our formidable captain. His bare sword, seeking occupation, cut at the tall grasses as he rode through them.

"Where are you, you good souls?" he cried as he drew rein before the place in which we held the King.

He needed not to call again, for the Count of Nullepart and I came out at once, carrying our royal prize, which, for the reason that it was habited in a night-gown only, was still covered by the bag. Two led horses had been brought for our use; and Sir Richard Pendragon had the captive lifted on to the front of his own saddle. The chief part of the design being then accomplished, the whole company galloped back to the bridge, which was no longer held by the arms of Castile. Our enemies had been beaten off with some loss by this sudden and totally unexpected foray.

No sooner had we crossed this bridge and had come again into safety, with the upper path leading to the drawbridge lying before us free of all our foes, than our formidable leader declared that not the capture of the King alone would content him. He had the royal prisoner transferred from his own saddle to that of the Count of Nullepart; and then he bade us both take the captive behind the walls of the castle into security, whilst he with a following of two hundred horsemen would proceed to inflict a further stroke upon the disorganized army in the plain below.

The Count of Nullepart and myself were loth

to assent to this proposal. For our blood being roused by this martial brilliancy, we also could have wished to go forward upon this enterprise. Yet it is the business of a soldier to obey his commander, and Sir Richard Pendragon had come to stand towards us in that relation. Besides, it was necessary that responsible persons should hold the custody of the royal captive.

Regretfully, therefore, we continued along the upper path with our great prize. And Sir Richard Pendragon riding down the hill, we could hear him marshalling with voice and with trumpet the two hundred horsemen that were gathered about the lower bridge to await his commands. And the last thing we heard of him as we took a turn in the path was an admonishment of these troopers in his mighty voice upon their discipline. With his own right hand he threatened to cut down each mother's son that dared to forsake his duty for private rapine.

"By my soul," said the Count of Nullepart, laughing softly, "I believe that mad English fellow is the first captain of the age."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

OF MADAM'S RENCOUNTER WITH THE FROWARD PRINCE.

It was with no little relief, and yet with curiosity, that we crossed the drawbridge and entered the

precincts of the castle. By now it was dark, but the light of the stars shed their soft lustre upon the sombre walls and the eager groups of soldiers that awaited us. It was clear that our exploit had become known in the castle, for no sooner had we crossed the threshold with our royal burden than loud cries of triumph were proclaimed from a hundred throats.

The first to greet us was Don Luiz, the opprobrious fat man. He was accompanied by a number of persons bearing lanterns. By their light we were able to remark that although the dignity of Don Luiz was now waxing so great that it would seem that he alone was the author of this fortunate pass, his bulk was yet sensibly diminished by the rigours it had recently sustained.

It was not easy for us to forbear from open laughter at the airs the fat man gave himself, the more especially when we recollected the indignities to which so lately he had been subjected.

"It will please the noble countess," said he, "to give an audience to the gracious King after he has taken some little refreshment and otherwise eased the royal personality of those discomforts that have recently encompassed it."

We crossed the outer patio and dismounted before the doors of the castle. The Count of Nullepart and I lifted the King from the saddle. Yet no sooner had we done this than we made the discovery that the royal prisoner had suffered so sorely in his durance that by now he was fallen insensible.

Thereupon we bore the unfortunate prince into

an apartment that had been set for his reception. Meats and wine were laid in it, also burning faggots and lighted candles. With our own hands we chafed the limbs of the King, and it gave us some concern to find, so close had his bonds been drawn, that in places the skin had been broken.

Having administered a powerful cordial to the King, having invested his nakedness in a furred gown and slippers, and having placed him in cushions next to the warmth, he was presently restored to something of his true mind. Thereupon we dressed him in the choicest silk raiment that could be found to fit him, and this was chiefly from the duke's own wardrobe.

The King then partook of food and wine, of which he could never have been in such sore need. More than twenty hours had passed since the Count of Nullepart and I had eaten, but before assuaging our necessity we were able to do ourselves the honour of ministering to the royal wants.

By these means the blood was restored to the King's countenance and animation to his eyes, and it was plain to see that rumour had not belied this ambitious prince. His features were those of an eagle, with a noble fire in the glance and a proud disdain. And in spite of his recent distresses and this present pass, that must have irked him to the soul, he bore himself most scrupulously in accordance with his lineage. With the frank courtesy of the high-born, he thanked the Count of Nullepart and myself for our services; and, with a somewhat rueful smile, he was good enough to say that had it been known to him

that his aged Uncle Roldan was able to gather such skilful minds about him, he would have conducted his campaign with a less degree of levity.

The King then asked of the English robber. He asked whether we were the countrymen and good friends of that formidable adventurer. And when we had answered the King that although we were far from being the countrymen of the redoubtable Sir Richard Pendragon, yet were his good servants in all that he pleased to command us, the King laughed.

"Ods blood!" said the King, "that English thief is the most accomplished villain in Spain. I wonder he did not cut my throat while he was upon his work; yet doubtless the rascal is wise to bait his hook with a live fish."

"By your gracious leave and forgiveness, sire," said the Count of Nullepart, in his charming manner, "doubtless he was fain to believe that a bag full of live royalty is of better account when it comes to the terms of a treaty than a bag full of dead bones."

"Yes, sir," said the King, with sombre eyes, "that was doubtless his argument."

When the King had supped he reposed for an hour; and in that period the Count of Nullepart and I were able to doff our peasants' disguise and to satisfy our hunger. Then came Don Luiz to inform us that his lordship's grace and the Countess Sylvia would receive the royal prisoner.

The King's limbs were still so sore and constrained that he could not walk without a great deal of assistance. Thus he entered the audience-

chamber leaning heavily upon the Count of Nullepart and myself.

We found our mistress seated, in the fashion of a royal queen, upon the daïs at the end of the apartment. By her side, yet in a sensibly lower place, was his lordship's grace, who was fast asleep with a backgammon board before him. He had been engaged in a game with the dwarf, who was now mumping and mowing from a corner, for he durst not show himself much to the Lady Sylvia.

In my travels through all parts of the world I have looked much upon female beauty. My gaze has been ensnared by the fair of many lands, yet never, I think, has it beheld a figure to compare with that of noble fire and queenly splendour that now greeted us.

"I give you no greeting, John of Castile," she said in her clear speech, that was so loud and ringing. "I make you no service, infamous cousin. I would not soil my lips with your name, you bloody and covetous villain, had they not long been accustomed to bespeak dogs and horses. But we would have you kneel for pardon, treacherous caitiff, whose blood smokes black in your heart like that of the evil fiend. For it is our intention, you paltry knave, first to cut off your ears, as we would those of a cheat and a pickpocket; and then we will devise in what further manner to deal with one who would rob his poor relations."

To this terrific speech that was delivered with an insolent scorn that could not have been surpassed, the King of Castile replied with a gesture of most

kingly disdain. And I think the little Countess Sylvia, meeting the full power of that sombre and fearless glance, was in some measure given to pause. She had not looked for it that an enemy brought captive into her hands should venture thus to outface the full torrent of her fury.

A minute of silence passed, in which each of these creatures exchanged their regal gestures. The meeting of their disdainful eyes was like that of a pair of true blades. It was as though each must overbear the other in the shock of their contention.

"It is my intention to ask no pardon, madam," said the King composedly. "I am a young man, but I am learned enough to ask pardon of none. I do not fear death."

"You do not fear death, base thief and murderer that you are!" said the Countess Sylvia, while her eyes spat at him. "Why should you fear death, you unready slave, when death shall come to you as the softest clemency of heaven?"

"Whatever indignity you are pleased to place upon this flesh, madam," said the King coldly, "it will be less than its merit for having permitted itself to fall into such hands."

At this speech, and the demeanour by which it was accompanied, the Countess Sylvia quivered all over with passion; and had the King been near to her, and a sword been ready to her hand, I think he had been spared that which was to befall him, for there and then he must have breathed his last.

You will not need to be told, gentle reader, that while these passages were toward, the Count of

Nullepart and I preserved a demeanour of the gravest propriety. Yet, could we have forgotten that the actors in this play were two of the most considerable persons of their age, and that their interview was like to have an extremely tragic issue, I think we must have yielded a little to mirth. For could anything have been more wanton than the addresses they paid to one another when the life of each might be said to depend on the other's clemency.

The Countess Sylvia had only to speak the word for the life of the King to be forfeit; while on his part, whether he lived or whether he perished, he was so sure of her castle falling into the hands of his soldiers, for he was a most powerful prince, and his resources were very great, that it was equally clear that her life also was in his power.

Now, this side of the matter was very plain to the Count of Nullepart. And in the very height of their bitter enmity he sought to render it to his mistress. After the most searching abuse to which the tongue of woman was ever applied had been met by the most open contempt—not very princely bearing on the side of either, yet the sublimity of their anger seemed to make it so—they were brought to such a pass that rage tied up their very mouths, so that they were fain to conduct their warfare with their eyes. Then it was, after they had thus been outfacing one another for I know not how long a period, that the Count of Nullepart, greatly daring, made the first of his recommendations to madam. In his subtlest manner he disclosed to her the case in which she stood.

"Peace, Sir Count," she said scornfully. "You are an honest good fellow, and you have well served the grace of his lordship, but you must know I can make no abatement of my resolve. The bloody-minded prince shall perish like a felon. He shall suffer every rigour that can be devised by the outraged gentle mind and nature of a daughter. It is not for naught that this uncivil wolf of the forest is come into the sheep-fold."

"I pray you, madam," said the Count of Nullepart, "graciously to permit me to remind you that, should the life of the King's majesty be forfeit, his great host will raze your father's castle to the earth. And personally I have no doubt that if a hair of this prince's head sustains an injury, you and all its other contents will be put to the sword."

"You speak truly, Sirrah Count," said madam. "But I myself will raze this castle to the earth, and all of us who are within it shall die upon our swords."

With his rare address the Count of Nullepart continued long to urge the more humane aspect of the matter, but the heart of his mistress was not to be moved. It was in vain that he exerted all those powers of wise enchantment in the use of which he was without a peer. His entreaties had no happier result than that the Countess Sylvia consented to postpone her measures upon the royal person of Castile against the return of her redoubtable captain, Sir Richard Pendragon, the English barbarian robber, than whom this unlucky prince had no more relentless and bitter foe.

"I am indeed between the vulture and the kite,"

said the King with a wry smile, while we were leading him away from this unfortunate audience. "My amiable, gentle, and dove-like cousin is desirous to cut off my ears, and proposes to slay me an inch at a time. I shall therefore be curious to learn the measures that are proposed by my friend of England. He will, doubtless, ordain that I am cooked in a pot."

We conducted the royal captive to the apartment in which he had supped. In this comfortable place we laid him that he might abide the return of not the least of his enemies. In so doing, however, we ventured to disobey the explicit will of our mistress. As we had left her presence she had enjoined us strictly that "the vile spawn of darkness be thrown among rats into the deepest and slimiest of the dungeons underground."

The King slept soundly after his late fatigues, but there was no repose that night for any others within the castle. The minds of all, from that of madam herself to that of the meanest scullion, were filled by a single theme. What had befallen Sir Richard Pendragon?

Already the exploits of the English giant had given to his name and personality something of a supernatural cast. Nor was this merely the view of the commonalty; it was shared by our mistress and the highly sagacious Count of Nullepart. Under the direction of such a leader we knew that great haps were toward in the darkness. And so lively and profound were our speculations of their nature, that excitement and anxiety reigned through all the long hours of the night.

CHAPTER XXXV.

OF SIR RICHARD PENDRAGON'S RETURN.

THE dawn came, yet Sir Richard Pendragon came not. I then made a proposal to our mistress, who had spent the night like a veritable captain walking upon her battlements. It was that I should be permitted to sally out into the plain with the hundred men remaining in our hands, in order that I might seek for our good friends, and if they were in need of succour, to bear it to them.

To this proposal madam assented. The Count of Nullepart, however, was greatly averse from it. He declared it to be the height of impolicy to withdraw from the castle the whole of its defence. It was in vain that I pointed out that as far as the eye could scan none of our enemy were visible. It would seem that the Castilian host had withdrawn in the night. Yet, greatly to my chagrin, it was given to the Count of Nullepart to prevail in his contention. It was doubtless due to the weight of his years that madam saw fit to revoke her permission.

The hours passed, however, and still Sir Richard Pendragon came not. Then it was that some sort of consternation began to fall upon us. Yet, as our high hopes began to wane a little, and anxious faces were to be seen on every side, the Countess Sylvia refused stoutly to believe that misfortune had overtaken her arms.

Never could a demeanour have been more steadfast than hers in the face of an ever-growing dismay. All through the blazing heat of the forenoon the Count of Nullepart and I remained with her upon the battlements, regarding that fair and wide-stretching plain below. Full many leagues were unrolled before us. Here were the dotted points of the spires and clustered houses of the imperial city of Toledo; there was the flashing silver ribbon of the Tagus curling in and out among the hills and meadows. Yet, strain our eyes as we might, there was never a sign of the Castilian host, nor of the redoubtable Sir Richard Pendragon and his mounted company.

In the face of this mystery we knew not what to believe. A great army had vanished from before our eyes. The white tents, hundreds in number, that were spread over the broad plain, were still exposed to the glare of the pitiless sun, yet all that day not a solitary soldier was to be seen about them. Such a remarkable circumstance encouraged even stout minds to attribute the whole matter to the exercise of the dark powers. For some were only too ready to believe that they were wielded by the Englishman. Indeed, it was recalled by many that he had more than once been heard to confess himself as a wizard.

Night fell again, yet still Sir Richard Pendragon came not. And as far as the most distant horizon no sign of an armed host was visible. The Countess Sylvia refused her food that evening, and summoned the chaplain of his lordship's grace, a holy

father of the Cistercians. She spent the night upon her knees in the chapel.

When the morning dawned she came out again to the battlements to resume her watch. Although her cheeks were wan and her looks were sad, they had lost nothing of their noble ardour. It seemed that foreboding had fallen upon her. And then in the lowest depths of her distress, she summoned the Count of Nullepart to her harshly, and bade him go immediately and cut off the ears of the spawn of darkness.

It was in vain that the Count of Nullepart urged his mistress to relent. Yet I must tell you, good reader, that in her present humour he durst not enforce her too much, lest he also were shorn. So, finding that his reluctance did but inflame her instancy, he had no other course save to go forth to obey.

The King of Castile was indeed a bitter enemy, and he had the name of a merciless prince. Therefore in the fortunes of war he was entitled to small consideration, yet the worshipful Count of Nullepart, as tardily enough he went forth to do the bidding of his mistress, was yet a person of civility and of a philosophic enlightenment which was only possible to one of the foremost minds of the age. Thus, upon taking counsel with myself upon the subject, the worshipful Count of Nullepart had recourse to a subterfuge, which, however, must have placed his own ears, if not his life, in jeopardy. Instead of obeying this severe ordination, he went and hid himself against the time when madam should have forgot her resolve.

How far this expedient served the Count of Nullepart will presently be shown. At noon, as madam still watched from the battlements, refusing all food, and suffering none to come near her, she summoned the Count of Nullepart again. As he was not to be found, she had me brought to her, and with much sternness bade me "go immediately and cut off the head of the bloody-minded prince."

Now, though the peril of the act was so great, I was fully determined to follow the course I had enjoined upon the Count of Nullepart. But suddenly the Countess Sylvia uttered a shrill cry, and then it was seen she had already ceased to regard her recent order.

Calling me back to her side, she bade me look out over the battlements, and tell her what I saw. And that which I had to inform her was that a mounted company was approaching through the plain.

For more than an hour we stood at gaze, seeking to discern who this might be. Howbeit, so slowly, and, as it seemed, so wearily, did the cavalcade come towards us, that at the end of that period it appeared hardly to have made a league. Yet, as we stood with our eyes forever strained upon the bright sunlight, and with I know not what wild speculations in our brains, I think I never saw our noble mistress with such a signal beauty in her mien.

None dared to speak to her as the tardy minutes passed. At gaze upon the topmost pinnacle of the conning-tower, with her small and slender woman's form tense as an arrow upon a bow, so that it seemed

to poise itself midway between the green plain and the blue sky, all the ardour of her soul seemed to merge in her glance. It was as though her proud heart was overmounted in the yearning for victory.

It was from the lips of our mistress, and by the agency of her two thought-wingèd eyes, that the glad news proclaimed itself.

"'Tis he," she said softly; "'tis him of England. It is Sirrah Red Dragon, the sweet giant, the valiant foreigner!"

As our mistress spoke these words, she placed her small white hand on my sleeve that was near to her, and it was like that of a small child that is fit only to grasp a toy. Yet when I felt the hot flame of passion that was burning in it, and its gentle trembling that was like the autumn willow, the hot blood of my youth surmounted me, and had I dared—and yet, reader, I must declare to you that I dared not—I would have paid half the course of nature to enfold this regal form to my breast.

I was waked from the trance of my desire by a profound sigh. It was of a melodious yet half mirthful bitterness. Without turning about I knew it to proceed from the Count of Nullepart. Yet, such was its delicacy that it lured me to turn my eyes to meet his own. And as they came together, we found within the gaze of one another the high yearning of our souls an hundred times reflected.

"Ah, my dear friend," he lisped in the gentle and charming melody of his speech, which yet

could not still the tumult of my soul, "have you forgot the Princess, she whom we serve yet see not, she whom we clasp yet cannot retain?"

"I curse that English robber!" I hissed in his ears. "I ask you, Sir Count, why does not the devil claim his own?"

"The better to plague an honest community, my dear friend," said the Count of Nullepart, with a soft laugh. "Yet, on his part, this gigantic and monstrous Maximus Homo is a profligate, happy and careless son of the earth, who forever disdains the caresses that our Princess Fortune casts upon him. To her he is the prince who mocks her with the valiant insolency of his prodigal nature."

And, as if to show that the worshipful Count of Nullepart had truly rendered his philosophy, at this moment a high yearning cry, like that of a soul in durance, was proclaimed in our ears. And we saw a crystal tear within each of the orbs of our mistress, within each of those orbs that were wont to look proud at the sun.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

OF SOLPESIUS MUS, THE CAPTAIN-GENERAL OF THE JOGALONES.

MADAM sat in council to receive Sir Richard Pendragon, her valiant captain. The afternoon sky burst through the western windows of the great chamber in the glory of crimson and gold. It

clothed in the frank nobility of heaven the form of our mistress, seated in her jewels and in her robes of state upon the daïs, with none near to her save his lordship's grace, who slept lustily. When the doors were flung back her eyes sparkled like the beautiful Tagus when its fair face is all dimpled in smiling to the princely sun, and her proud lips were wide-parted as with the entranced speech of the heart's poetry. A fanfare was sounded upon trumpets; and then Sir Richard Pendragon, leading nine captive noblemen, some with silver hairs, with their hands bound and halters about their necks, came into the presence of his mistress.

"I give you greeting, Sirrah Red Dragon," said the Countess Sylvia, in speech of clear and round simplicity. "You are a true captain. You have done well."

With the gesture of a queen she extended her beautiful hand.

"I kiss your feet, madam and ladyship," said the English giant, sweeping off his bonnet, and his was the gesture of princes.

As he knelt to her, and touched the small hand that was all lily-white delicacy with his own enormous paw that was begrimed with travel and foul with the use of the sword, my two eyes sought the spot in which to place the poniard between his mighty shoulders. Yet was I fain to dismiss this thought as inconsistent with the sangre azul of my nation.

For the English giant had done well. Like a great and redoubtable captain—and some there were to believe that this product of a barbarous land was the

first of his age—he had seized the hour when panic had descended upon the Castilian host. When they were as sheep without a shepherd, owing to their belief that the Prince of Darkness had spirited away the father of the flock, he had fallen upon them under the cover of night. He had dealt with them ruthlessly, killing many, despoiling their treasuries, abusing their arms, pursuing them off the plains full many a league, and dispersing a proud army to the four winds of God.

All this had the Englishman performed under the cover of night, at the instance of no more than two hundred well-mounted men. So had their fears at the mysterious loss of their king wrought upon the soldiers of the army of Castile that they had fled hot-foot in all directions before the onfall of Sir Richard Pendragon. For they were fain to believe that the Prince of Darkness had returned to claim them as well as their royal master.

In the very act of pursuit the Englishman had indulged his masterful skill to the full. He had singled out those of our foes it would profit him best to destroy. He had cut down all of the King's captains and ministers he could come at, overriding them full many a league, yet sparing nine of the foremost in order that their presence in captivity might pleasure our mistress and promote the terms of the peace.

In this also Sir Richard Pendragon had counted well. The presence of these nine noble Castilians with halters about their necks gave credence to the wonderful story that he had to tell. When his great

exploit had been unfolded in its fulness, it appeared that the power of Castile was broken. And when madam understood so much, and further, that her great captain had not only delivered her of famine and the sword, but had also returned with great loot of treasure, she said with a proud yet gentle instancy that her good Sirrah Red Dragon might command her anything.

Now, in the fire of that imperious yet chaste and lovely glance the Count of Nullepart and myself read the invitation for which our veins were hungry. Yet I think it must be allowed to the Count of Nullepart that he had the gift of prophecy. For as the Countess Sylvia again extended her slender fingers that were all lily-white daintiness, the English barbarian robber, as he bore them to his bearded chops in his bloodstained gripe, caused the very roof to re-echo with his laughter.

"By my good mother's soul!" he roared, "if it were not that old honest Dickon durst not marry out of the English nobility, sweet madam and ladyship, you might easily have the best husband in Spain."

Again the eyes of the Countess Sylvia sparkled like the beautiful Tagus.

"What words are these, Sirrah Red Dragon?" said she with a proud instancy. "Do you reject the gracious dignity of a woman's heart? Is it, Sirrah Red Dragon, that you disdain the royal gratitude of an hundred descents?"

"It is that I neither disdain nor reject them, madam," said the English giant, speaking as though his soul was an empire, yet with a whim-

sical humour in his great red eyes. "But this old jack bully must reck his rede, as we English say. He can never marry, good madam and ladyship, although there is the blood of kings under his doublet. He must reck his rede. He is the offspring of fantasy; he was born in a mild and sweet season under the bright moon. He is of the seed of Merlin; the sap of Arthur is in his bones; and although he had a good mother, and he is the natural son of Henry Plantagenet, yet from his natal hour a bend sinister hath twisted his sweet soul. Therefore he can wed no woman, dear little Spanish butterfly, for, let me whisper it in thy pretty ears, that good Dickon, honest fellow, is none other than the veritable Solpesius Mus, the Captain-General of the Jogalones."

Having thus spoke our mistress in this strange mad wise, the English giant, for all the world as though his soul was a wide dominion, bent to her his grinning visage and bussed her soundly upon the lips in the presence of the whole company. No sooner had she suffered this bold caress than she withdrew her face swiftly, as though it had been stung by the venom of bees. Her cheek was like a crimson flower and her eyes brimmed with their passionate tears.

"Sirrah giant," said this delectable thing, as if she too had a wide dominion in her soul, "I would have the whole of thee, the whole of thy great capacity and thy wide-wingêd fantasy, or I would have thee not at all."

"Alack, alack!" said the Englishman with a whimsical sigh, "that poor Dickon, old honest fellow,

should be none other than the veritable Solpesius Mus, the Captain-General of the Jogalones ! "

And in my ears came the soft enchanting laughter of the worshipful Count of Nullepart.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

OF THE RIGOURS TO BE SUFFERED BY THE INFAMOUS KING.

THE proud tears were still in the eyes of our mistress, when she looked all about her swiftly with the features of a hawk. In ringing tones she cried, " Bring forth the spawn of darkness. We will now arrange his fate."

When the Count of Nullepart and myself made to obey this command, as you will believe, gentle reader, we had grave concern lest madam should observe the presence of the captive's ears. And such was her present humour that I think we did well to have apprehension of the penalty that might overtake us. Greatly doubtful, we led forth the Castilian from his durance and brought him into the room.

The King of Castile entered the presence of his victorious adversaries with a calm and noble smile. Yet no sooner did his gaze fall upon the grey-bearded noblemen with halters about their necks than his eyes drooped, and a great anguish seemed to cloud them.

The relentless eyes of madam were fixed upon her foe.

"Dost thou see them, bloody-minded one?" said she. "These old bears shall have the fangs drawn out of their chaps so that they shall bite no more."

Then, like a veritable sovereign princess, she turned to Sir Richard Pendragon, to whom all the success of her arms was due.

"Avise us, Sirrah Red Dragon. Avise us in what manner we shall cast out these several parcels of beastliness that encumber the earth."

"By our lady!" said the English giant, rubbing the palm of one hand slowly round that of the other, "if that is not my honest gossip, John Castilian, I am a poor mad soul! English Richard gives a greeting to you, John Castilian, a greeting to your most excellent King's majesty."

Upon this speaking, Sir Richard Pendragon was like to crack his head on the ground with his lowly obeisance.

Although the King of Castile seemed all broken by the disaster that had overtaken his arms, upon hearing the voice of Sir Richard Pendragon he looked up and received his mockery with an unflinching glance.

"Foreign robber," he said simply, "you have borne yourself as a true captain. I make you my service. And as the life of myself and the lives of my honourable friends are forfeit to your cunning I hope that they may profit you."

These words, spoken only as a King could deliver them, brought a sort of whimsical pity to the mocking face of the English barbarian.

"Dost thou remember, John Castilian," he said, with that softness which the Count of Nullepart and I knew was wont to accompany his most ferocious designs, "that summer's morning a twelvemonth since, when thou flungest one of a gentle and kindly nuture, a good mother's son, into the deepest dungeon of your Spanish palace, and chained him by the leg, with foul straws for his pillow, and with lean rats and large beetles for his only familiar company?"

"Yes, foreign robber, I remember it to my sorrow," said the King of Castile coldly. "And had I broke you upon the wheel and thrown your corpse to the dogs a day before my reckoning, I should not now be mourning for not having done so."

"John Castilian," said the Englishman, "you speak in the wise of an unfortunate famous ancestor of mine own. He was called Sir Procrastinatus, owing to the unlucky habit of his mind that he continually put off till the morrow that which he should have done the day; a habit that in the process of nature grew upon the unlucky wight in such a measure that upon the last day of his life he failed to die until after his friends had buried him. Can it be, John Castilian, that yourself is a victim to a like preoccupancy? For I understand from madam's gracious ladyship that your trench hath been dug the last three days in the kitchen midden."

"No, no, Sirrah Red Dragon, that is not so," said madam ruthlessly. "The spawn of darkness is entitled to no burial. We will hang it upon a

fork on the outer barbican to poison the crows and the vultures and the unclean fowls of the air."

"A thousand pardons, ladyship," said Sir Richard Pendragon. "It appears I am the victim of a misinformation.

"Do you avise us, Sirrah Red Dragon, so that the bloody-minded prince shall begin his dying immediately? But we would have him take not less than one-and-twenty days to the consummation of it, for we would have him drain the dregs of the cup he hath prepared for others."

It was here, however, that Sir Richard Pendragon began to stroke his beard. Mad he was, and whimsical, yet beyond all things he had a mind for affairs. Therefore he was fain to speak aside with the Count of Nullepart and myself.

"By my troth," he said, "it would be a happy deliverance of a bad man if John Castilian was hung on the gate with a spike through his neck. But grievously do I doubt me of the wisdom of the policy. We are but three hundred men-at-arms, and Castile is a broad dominion. If we put out the life of this prince, the queen-mother will gather new forces and come again to the gate. And honest Dickon is fain to observe that the old bitch wolf will be found with a longer tooth than the whelp."

That this was the voice of wisdom we had no thought to deny. Therefore it behoved us to spread the light of statecraft before our mistress. Yet, as you will readily believe, such a task was no light one. Still, accomplished it must, although

he who would turn a woman aside from her vengeance may be said to take his life in his hand.

Sir Richard Pendragon, however, was the last man in the world to blench before the face of danger. And so, with a most humble civility that rendered the sinister laughter of his eyes the more formidable, he addressed the Countess Sylvia.

"Madam," said he, "was old honest Dickon dreaming o' nights when he heard the grace of your ladyship's nobility declare that he might command her anything?"

The fair damask cheek of our mistress grew again like that of a carnation; again were her eyes filled with proud shining.

"You heard aright, Sirrah Red Dragon," she said softly. "It is my desire that you command me anything."

"Then old honest Dickon, a good fellow, kisses your small feet and makes you a leg, peerless rose of the south, and he asks for the life of John Castilian."

The bosom of our mistress heaved rebelliously. Tears of mortified caprice crept into her eyes. With contempt and bitterness she cast a glance at the King, who stood in mournful converse with his ministers. She then confronted her great captain.

"Sirrah Red Dragon," she said in accents that were choked by a rage of tears, "do you take the life of the spawn of darkness. Use it as you will, sirrah. It was you that gave it to me; it is meet that you should receive it back again. I do not ask upon what pretext you would hold it; but—

but, sirrah," and her whole form quivered strangely, "I do ask—I do ask, sirrah, is this the whole of your good pleasure?"

Yet no sooner had she spoke those last unlucky words, and, as it were, laid bare her proud bosom, than she averted her beautiful cheeks that were like a scarlet rose, and in the sudden wild rage of her own weakness, that she whom kings must woo in vain had come herself to woo, she hid her eyes.

"Nay, by the soul of a nice mother," said Sir Richard Pendragon, "this is but a moiety of what her good son would ask you. Having received the life of John Castilian, he would ask your permission, madam, that in some sort he may punish him, for you need not to be told that his crimes are many and abominable."

"As you say, Sirrah Red Dragon, his crimes are many and abominable," said the Countess Sylvia. "I would indeed have you punish him. I would have you punish him with all possible rigour."

Speaking thus, she gazed at the unfortunate prince with a power of resentment that he, who was true to his degree, met with a calm indifferency.

"All possible rigour," said Sir Richard Pendragon softly, "is indeed the best part of the design of your old honest servant. And to that end, madam, I would ask to deliver John Castilian to you again in order that you may bestow this dreadful rigour upon him."

"It is well, Sirrah Red Dragon," said his mistress. "In this you are wise. We shall know in what

sort to visit the spawn of darkness and bloody-minded prince."

"And yet, madam," said Sir Richard Pendragon, "by the grace of your ladyship is it not left to old honest Dickon to nominate the weapons of your severity?"

"Pray do so, Sirrah Red Dragon," said madam with a courteous indulgence. "But perhaps you will not omit to weigh the efficacy upon delicate flesh of hot sharp-pointed nails? And also of hard pieces of rock upon the sensitive limb bones?"

"Nay, madam," said Sir Richard Pendragon, "a good mother's son forgets not the efficacy of these honest things; yet, under the favour of your ladyship, if he is minded to speak out of his ripe observation, this elderly seeker after virtue would venture to recommend an even more dreadful rigour, a rigour even more salutary."

"By every manner of means, Sirrah Red Dragon, I would have you recommend it."

As the Countess Sylvia spoke she fixed another remorseless glance upon the unhappy prince.

"That which one who is old, madam," said the English giant in his softest voice, "and one who hath been accustomed all his years to grope for the light of the truth is fain to recommend to the grace of your ladyship, is the most excessive rigour known to mankind; a greater rigour which contains all the lesser rigours within itself; a rigour which poor unlucky manhood, be it that of prince or of peasant, is wont to regard with the same abhorrence as a sea-coal fire is regarded by a gib

cat with a singed tail. The barbarous and excessive rigour to which your old honest servant refers, madam, is that which is profanely called holy matrimony. English Dickon humbly submits, madam, that you should receive John Castilian in the bonds of wedlock, and so visit the royal rascal according to his merit."

Upon the enunciation of this project, which had only been possible to one of Sir Richard Pendragon's surpassing boldness, the Count of Nullepart and myself had a lively fear that madam would drive her poniard into the heart of her over-presumptuous captain. For when he spoke in this wise her slender fingers trembled on the jewelled hilt of her dagger, and she cried out with flaming eyes,—

"Wed the spawn of darkness, sirrah! Wed the bloody-minded prince!"

"Even so, madam," said the English giant, withdrawing a pace from her striking hand. "Under your gracious favour, that is the rigour that is humbly proposed by one who hath grown old in the love of virtue."

As the Englishman spoke, a change was wrought in the demeanour of the Countess Sylvia. Like a very woman or a small child, or perchance like them both (for the worshipful Count of Nullepart assures me that they are one and the same), she peered into the eyes of her captain. And the manner of this action, which was one of a furtive modesty, seemed to imply that she dared hardly to look lest she should discover that which she feared to see.

"Wed the spawn of darkness!" she breathed softly. "I—I, Sirrah Red Dragon—I wed the froward prince!"

She continued to repeat these words in a low voice. Yet ever and anon she peered upwards to the red and hungry eyes of her great captain, that were full of a sombre and whimsical fantasy. And to the worshipful Count of Nullepart and to myself, who hung upon each phase of that which was toward, it seemed to us both, in the curious anguish of our hearts, that the life-blood of the little Countess Sylvia ebbed away from her even as she gazed.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE LAST.

I KNOW not how long it was before the eyes of our mistress recoiled from that humorous front with which her great captain met the whole assembly. With her, I fear, it must have been an age. Yet at last her gaze, that was now helpless, faltered altogether, and, like a proud-winged bird with its plumage torn, it fell to earth.

At the same instant this delectable form was shaken bitterly. And then our mistress looked up, and with eyes that shone no more like the Tagus, and with cheeks ashen white instead of the rosy carmine of a fair flower, she said with a most beautiful gentleness,—

"An it please you, Sirrah Red Dragon, I—I will wed the froward prince."

Without permitting her unhappiness to stray away to him to whom this resolve was published, she summoned to her side the royal captive with an air that was ineffable.

The King, who was only too well acquainted with all that had passed, for it was of the highest significance to Castile and to himself, came forward at his youthful cousin's behest.

"Froward prince," said the Countess Sylvia, speaking with a sweet broken gentleness which yet seemed to proclaim a wide dominion of the soul, "your crime is forgot. The halters are taken from the throats of your ministers. Your treasuries are given back to you; and with them is given my good pleasure."

With a cheek the colour of snow, our mistress held forth her slender jewelled fingers to him of Castile. Yet at first the King made no sign, perhaps for bewilderment or perhaps for shame. And then, slowly and modestly, with a humility in all his gestures, with a pure and noble fire in his eyes, he knelt before her and bowed his head.

THE END.

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The scene of Mr. Harland's love story of an English artist and Italian duchess is laid in the exquisite country of Northern Lombardy. The book is as delicate and fanciful as a fairy tale, and its immense sales for the last ten years are a proof of its great popularity.

ELEANOR. Mrs. Humphry Ward.

In this novel, which has also been the subject of successful drama, Mrs. Ward deals with Italian life. It is in the main a love story, and contains many brilliant studies of English and American character.

TRUE TILDA. "Q."

In this delightful story "Q." tells of the adventures of a little circus girl who falls in with a small boy from a pauper home, and with him sets out to find his inheritance. The scene is laid among the canals in the Severn valley. Tilda is one of the author's most delightful creations. Her courage, humour, and good sense rise triumphant over every difficulty.

RUPERT OF HENTZAU. Anthony Hope.

This is a sequel to the famous "Prisoner of Zenda," already published in Nelson's Sevenpenny Library. It tells of the end of the long vendetta between young Rupert of Hentzau and the Englishman, Rudolph Rassendyll. It is needless to praise a book which, with its predecessor, has been recognized as one of the greatest of modern romances.

EXTON MANOR. Archibald Marshall.

A delightful story of English country life, full of Trollope's close observation and something of Thackeray's humour.

HELBECK OF BANNISDALE. Mrs. H. Ward.

This is a tale of conflict between love and religion. A young girl brought up in agnostic surroundings falls in love with the son of an old Catholic house, and the end is tragedy. The book is a wonderful study of the religious mind in diverse forms.

THE LADY IN THE CASE. Jacques Futrelle.

Mr. Futrelle's "Professor on the Case" (published in Nelson's Sevenpenny Library) showed him a master of a peculiarly ingenious type of detective tale. This volume is a single story, and is concerned with the intrigues of the Latin nations to form a Latin League which will checkmate the Northern powers. The scene is laid in Washington, and the plot reveals how an American Secret Service officer and a beautiful and mysterious lady, who is the chief agent of the Latin League, fight a long duel, which ends in his victory and in a mutual falling in love. It is one of the best of recent mysteries, and may be heartily recommended to all lovers of this class of fiction.

MR. CLUTTERBUCK'S ELECTION. H. Belloc.

In this book Mr. Belloc gives us a brilliant fantasy of modern politics. He traces the adventures of Mr. Clutterbuck, a tradesman of Croydon, who by sheer accident makes a large fortune, is drawn into politics, is elected for Parliament and unseated; and finally, by persistence and intrigue, attains the ambition of his heart and a knighthood. The book is in the first place a capital story, in the second excellent fun, and in the third a very acute and often legitimate satire upon certain modern conventions.

A MAN OF MARK. Anthony Hope.

A study in fantastic politics and in human nature.

THE ROAD. Frank Savile.

Mr. Savile's romances have a great vogue in the United States, for he is a master of swift and vivid narrative. In this tale he tells of the strife between the American engineers of a Balkan railway and the secret society of the "Black Hand."

THE REFUGEES. A. Conan Doyle.

This is one of Sir A. Conan Doyle's best historical romances. It tells of the Court of Louis XIV. of France, and then of the French settlements in Canada, whither the hero goes to find freedom. The book is full of admirable historical portraits and many stirring and breathless incidents.

COUNT ANTONIO. Anthony Hope.

"Count Antonio" has always been a favourite work of the admirers of Mr. Anthony Hope. It has much of the gay romance of the "Zenda" stories, joined to much of the subtlety of his English comedies. Like Mr. Maurice Hewlett, he takes us to mediæval Italy, but there is nothing out of date in the interest of his tale. It is the eternal romance of love and loyalty.

THE WATERS OF JORDAN. H. A. Vachell.

In this fine novel Mr. Vachell tells the tale of an aimless man who makes shipwreck of his life. He goes to hide himself in a lonely part of the New Forest, and finds there such peace and healing as the lepers of old found in the waters of Jordan. The story is full of that rare thing sentiment which never falls into sentimentality. It is a beautiful and moving allegory of human life.

THE SKIPPER'S WOOING. W. W. Jacobs.

It is late in the day to praise "The Skipper's Wooing." It is the most popular of Mr. Jacobs's most popular books, and has long been a classic. No more mirth-provoking story has been written in our time, and no more human and sympathetic study of simple folk. The publishers are glad to be able to add a second work of Mr. Jacobs to "The Lady of the Barge," which has long been one of the most popular volumes in the Library.

THOMPSON'S PROGRESS. C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne.

This is Mr. Cutcliffe Hyne's most ambitious work. It is the story of the progress of a young Yorkshireman from poacher to mill-hand, and thence to mill-owning, high finance, and public life. It is a strong and masterful study of character, and like all Mr. Cutcliffe Hyne's work, it is full of vivid descriptions and picturesque incidents.

THE PRISONER OF ZENDA. Anthony Hope.

In Mr. Anthony Hope's famous tale he has inaugurated a new kind of romance, in which the modern English gentleman can find a mysterious state of Eastern Europe, and play a part there in high politics as adventurous as anything in the Middle Ages. Both as a novel and as a play the story has become a modern classic.

LADY ROSE'S DAUGHTER. Mrs. H. Ward.

In this remarkable novel Mrs. Humphry Ward has worked the life story of the famous Mademoiselle de Lespinasse into a modern setting. It is a study of modern society and high politics, and against this glittering background we have a very original and charming love story.

THE DOLLY DIALOGUES. Anthony Hope.

This is the book which, when first published, made Mr. Anthony Hope's reputation as a writer of social comedies. Dolly, Lady Mickleham, is the first of the witty and irresponsible ladies who for the last decade have enlivened English fiction. She is also by far the best, and the gravest reader is captivated by the grace and humour of the Dialogues.

WHEN VALMOND CAME TO PONTIAC. Sir Gilbert Parker.

In this charming story Sir Gilbert Parker tells of the fortunes of a young adventurer in Canada in the early nineteenth century who claimed to be the son of the great Napoleon. The mystery of his life and his tragic death make up one of the most original and moving of recent romances. The author does for Quebec what in other works he has done for the Western and Northern wilds—he interprets to the world its essential romance.

THE GENTLEMAN FROM INDIANA. Booth Tarkington.

In this book the author of "Monsieur Beaucaire" tells a story of his own country. "The Gentleman from Indiana" is a tale of a young university graduate who becomes a newspaper owner and editor in a Western town, and wages war against "graft" and corruption. His crusade brings him into relations with the girl who had captured his heart at college, and their love story is subtly interwoven with his political campaign. It is one of the best of modern American novels, and readers will delight not only in the stirring drama of the plot, but in the fresh and sympathetic pictures given of the young townships of the West.

THE WAGES OF SIN. — Lucas Malet.

The publication of "The Wages of Sin" brought "Lucas Malet" (Mrs. St. Leger Harrison) into the front rank of contemporary novelists. The *Guardian* wrote on its appearance: "In reminding society that wages have to be paid by those who sin, and that those wages do not, as a rule, end with the sinner, Lucas Malet has given us a powerfully moral as well as a most striking and original novel."

THE SLEEPER AWAKES. — H. G. Wells.

This fantasy, to which Mr. Wells has written a new preface, treats of the world in the far future. The hero goes to sleep for two centuries, and awakens to find that modern movements have worked out their logical result. He is emperor of the world because he controls its greatest wealth, but he carries into the new age some of the old ideals of the past. His desperate struggle against the tyranny of force and his heroic death are among the most wonderful chapters of Mr. Wells's work.

BORN IN EXILE. — George Gissing.

Mr. Gissing has a unique place among our novelists. He is the great portrayer of the life of the respectable poor and the shabby genteel. His realism is never sordid, for it is always redeemed by a high moral purpose and an austere and conscientious art. "Born in Exile" is a study of a young man of the lower classes who fights his way to a considerable learning, but whose creed is upturned by his love for a woman of another social sphere. Mr. Gissing has never written anything more moving or more true.

PROFESSOR ON THE CASE. Jacques Futrelle.

The Professor is a devotee of pure logic, and, by acting on the principle that two and two always make four, is able to elucidate the most baffling mysteries. Every story in the book has a *dénouement* which no reader can possibly forecast. At the same time the Professor's solutions, when they are expounded, are so convincing as to seem elementary.

THE HOUSE OF A THOUSAND CANDLES. Meredith Nicholson.

This novel, which has had an enormous vogue in the United States, is a good example of a new school of American fiction, in which the wildest romance is brought into commonplace modern life. The hero, by an uncle's will, succeeds to a strange house in the Western States, where he is bound to live for a certain period of time. The meaning of this condition, and the surprising adventures which befall him, are told in the book. It is a story to which the term "breathless" may well be applied; but rapid and startling as the incidents are, they are never crude or unconvincing. Taken along with "The War of the Carolinas," in Nelson's Sevenpenny Library, it gives an excellent example of the two sides of Mr. Nicholson's talent.

GOTTY AND THE GUV'NOR. A. Copping.

Mr. Copping's book is the story of a Southend fisherman who acts as skipper of the writer's little yacht. Gotty is a great creation—simple, humorous, practical, and loyal—with a hint of Mr. W. W. Jacobs's heroes, but emphatically a type by himself. The story of the cruise of the yacht will delight all lovers of the sea, and the final return voyage from Devonshire in a furious gale is as dramatic an episode as modern sea fiction can show.

EXPENSIVE MISS DU CANE. S. Macnaughtan.

This is a comedy of a country house in which a number of present-day types appear. There is tragedy in the tale, but tragedy of the kind common in our modern world, which is unspoken and scarcely realized. The heroine is singularly sympathetic and carefully studied, and no reader will be able to avoid the spell of her charm.

FARM OF THE DAGGER. Eden Phillpotts.

Dartmoor is as much Mr. Phillpotts's own country by right of conquest as the Scottish Borders were Sir Walter Scott's, and Exmoor the late Mr. R. D. Blackmore's. The present tale deals with the time of the American War and the early years of the nineteenth century. It is also a record of action and adventure, and combines the merits of a novel of character with those of a fine romance.

THE AMERICAN. Henry James.

The publishers are glad to be able to add to Nelson's Library an example of the best work of one who is regarded with justice as among our greatest living novelists. "The American" has always been considered by his admirers as one of the most perfect examples of Mr. Henry James's remarkable art.

VALERIE UPTON. Miss A. D. Sedgwick.

This is a study of one type of the American young woman, who, with the phrases of self-sacrifice and idealism always upon her lips, is radically cold-hearted and selfish. It is a brilliant character study, and the repellent figure of the daughter is relieved by the gracious character of her mother—a character which is in many ways one of the most subtle and attractive in modern fiction.

CYNTHIA'S WAY. Mrs. Alfred Sidgwick.

Mrs. Sidgwick has won a reputation as a writer of ingenious comedies. The heroine in this tale is an English girl of great wealth, who to amuse herself goes to Germany and masquerades as a poor governess. These studies of German home life are accurately observed and done with much humour and art, and in the background there is a charming love story.

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Every one who likes a stirring tale with sparkling dialogue and the fine manners of another age should read this novel.

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Mr. Masefield, who has won fame as a poet, is now recognized as one of the most brilliant of our younger romancers. "Captain Margaret" is a story of piracy and desperate deeds in the Spanish Main. But it is no mere tale of adventure, though there are adventures enough, but a subtle and brilliant study of a chivalrous and sensitive mind placed in situations of desperate perplexity. It is a type of the new romance which is at once dramatic and profound.

THE HOUSE OF LYNCH. Leonard Merrick.

Mr. Merrick is emphatically *laudatus a laudatis*, for the chief novelists of our day, such as Mr. J. M. Barrie, are loud in the praise of his work. "The House of Lynch" is the story of the daughter of an American millionaire who marries a poor artist and repudiates her fortune. Her struggles with poverty, her misunderstandings with her husband, and the final use of the great wealth which comes to her against her will, provide the materials for an entrancing romance.

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